

IN
GOD'S
GOOD
TIME

—
H.M. ROSS



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IN GOD'S GOOD TIME

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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IN GOD'S GOOD TIME

A NOVEL

BY

H. M. ROSS

*Author of "That Man's Daughter,"
"Her Blind Folly," etc.*



NEW YORK

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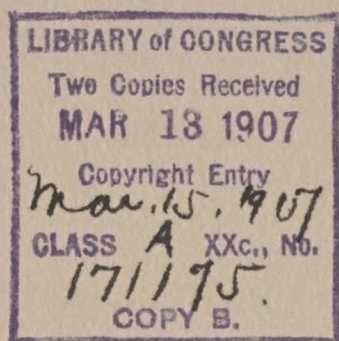
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“IN GOD’S GOOD TIME.”

PROLOGUE.

IN the daylight, when men and babes are brave; in the daylight, when the glorious sun makes all darkness bright—on golden July days or burning August noons, there was no spot in all Lestrange to make even a child fear it. It was a wonderful place, as all who knew it acknowledged; but there were uncanny corners in its dense woods, and the countryside were apt, at festive gatherings, to whisper of the gray ghost of the Hall, who walked the valley o’ nights, wringing her fleshless fingers.

But no gray lady preceded the worst misfortune that had ever happened to aught of the worthy line. The night winds sweeping softly and tenderly from the south; the gentle dew falling softly and tenderly upon earth’s broad bosom; the peace of the deep midnight, and ever and anon the faint chirp of a stirring bird—these were the signs and omens that attended the thing of evil. Deep and dark lay the shadows about the grim old Hall, its rugged outlines softened by the dusky blue background. Tall and white gleamed the huge gates that shut out the world from about Lestrange.

The silence of the night! How cool it was, how scented, and how sweet! A night to dream of doing deeds of charity, and to pray for strength to fulfil them on the morrow. A night filled with the joy of perfect rest, when nature lies, not sound asleep, but drowsing, with a smile upon her lips, waiting for the dawn.

And on this quiet silence of the night, on this gentle mood of nature, man needs must come, not in love, but hatred: on this soft stillness he must project his evil thoughts, his meanness and cupidity. Out of the tall white gates, barely stirring on well-oiled hinges, there stole two forms. No words were exchanged: speech would have been dangerous. Side by side they stepped into the gloom of the winding path, and were lost therein.

A little bird cheeped sleepily from out a neighboring tree, and then returned to her bird dreams of happy fledglings, whose tiny bodies were even then covered by her downy wings. There was no sign to tell of the crime that had been committed; no sign to indicate that heaven, stooping above the earth God had made so beautiful, turned sadly from the sight it saw—no sign, no sign of this.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAITHFUL JOAN.

THE young mistress of Lestrangle looked up from her writing-table with an inquiring glance.

“Shall I take Master Roderic for his walk now, madam?” asked the bright-looking maid, whose entrance had interrupted her.

“Where is Joan?”

“Busy with Mrs. Angell. She said, when Master Roderic was ready, that I should take him out along the—”

“Bring him here,” said Mrs. Lestrangle, and the maid withdrew.

Her mistress shoved her half-written letter into the drawer hastily, and rose to her feet, pushing back her heavy fair hair with delicate fingers.

“This can wait,” she went on, half-aloud. “Since Joan’s little nephew is so ill, I can not rid myself of this haunting fear. How foolish! But what if something should happen to the

child! No, no; I mustn't think of that—I dare not. God is good, very good. I have had enough to bear!”

There was a frown that would be hard to decipher upon her lovely forehead.

“Surely enough,” she said, under her breath—
“surely enough. I must feel so because the other little fellow was so intimate with Roderic— If it should be a fever! And Roderic— Now what a fool I am!”

Her sad thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of the maid, who was preceded by a charming little boy of about four summers. His mother held out her arms, and he ran into them, laughing.

“I'd much prefer going out with you, mother,” he said, with a grown-up choice of words that sounded strange on such young lips. “You let me do lots of things that Elizabeth won't. Come on, mother!”

He tugged at her arm, and the shadows disappeared from her lovely face as she looked at her child—strong, healthy, ruddy—a picture to delight any fond mother's heart.

“Do hasten, mother. I want to see Tommy Lester, if you'll walk that far—will you, mother?”

I want to show him that new kite Uncle Fred-eric made me yesterday.”

“My dear, have you forgotten that Tommy Lester is too ill even to see his little friend Rod-eric? Did you ask the Lord and His Blessed Mother to make him better?”

“Yes, mother—last night and this morning. He’ll be better soon, now—maybe to-morrow. I’ll leave my kite upstairs, then—I won’t bring it with me, if you’ll come right away, mother.”

Mrs. Lestrangle took the confiding little hand in hers, and so they walked out on to the broad stone steps that led from the great door of Lestrangle Hall down to the sunny walks and paths into which part of the grounds had been converted: a beautiful place, well cared for, mellowed by the progress of the years: designed, indeed, to be Old World in style of architecture, but the freshness of the New had crept into it—indefinably, perhaps, but it was there. And these broad acres, and this great house, and all that it contained, were the property of the pretty, fair-haired, unconscious child, who was his mother’s image, and who looked up at her with the dancing, merry blue eyes that were as hers had been before calumny and sorrow shadowed them.

Some heavy oppression weighed upon her spirits now. No slavishly fond mother, yet her ears were ever ready to listen to Roderic's gay chatter. Eagerly he urged her to hasten—wisely enough, young scamp!—for he knew that Joan might appear at any moment, and carry him away with her, putting an end to this jaunt with his pretty mother. She was not responsive—but stood, looking about her. For six years Le-strange had been her home. She had come to it a girl of twenty summers, the bride of a man double her age. She had come to it a butterfly, a careless, happy, unthinking girl, a little bit vain of the beauty that had won the richest and proudest man in all her set—she having naught to bring to him but that beauty, and the splendid heritage of good and healthy and honorable blood. Widowed and a mother, the affections of her heart repudiated and scorned, the victim of distrust which left a keener sting than sorrow for the dead does usually, she gazed about her now, and the memory of the last few years held her tightly in its grip. How she had reveled in the unexpected glory of wood and field, of bower and arbor, of brook and stream, and all the hidden delights that nature has to spread for those who

seek her, truly loving her! Once more she saw her husband's face, dark, grave, but very gentle, a light in his eyes that only she could bring there. And then his face came before her again—hard, unrelenting. How she had begged him to tell her the reason of this change! Without result.

“Oh, it was cruel—it was cruel!” she said, between her teeth. “How could he have believed anything but good of me? What had I done—what said? Money! What money can repay for lack of trust?—and he distrusted me. What money can repay for loss of love?—and he took his away from me. Oh, it was cruel, cruel!”

The child was quick to read her moods, for his chatter ceased. After a while he spoke.

“You are thinking of father,” he said, gravely. She looked at him, startled.

“My son!” she said.

“Always I know it—when you look like that,” he said. And then after another grave moment: “Mother, does father know?”

“That I am thinking of him?” A quick shudder went over her from head to foot. “He must, dear—he must. Father was a good man—a true man, and he must know now. Little lad,” she went on, bending her fair head to kiss his

forehead, "what a comfort you are to mother! For if father knows, then all is right between us."

He did not understand, but he saw that she was agitated. He caught her dress.

"Here is Uncle Frederic, mother," he said, in a low voice.

Somehow, young as he was, he felt that his mother would want to know of his Uncle Frederic's approach. Again she started, as she recognized the fact that her child, baby that he was, seemed to read her mind. But her features were quiet as she turned them toward the handsome man slowly ascending the broad stone steps. There was a conventional smile of greeting on her lips.

"Good-morning!" she said. "Where have you been? I did not see you at breakfast."

"No," he answered; "I went out early. I called at Lester's. The little fellow—"

"Yes?" In spite of her self-control her voice quivered. "The little fellow—"

He glanced at Roderic, and the expression on his face told the mother the thing she dreaded hearing. A spasm contracted her lips.

"Gone!" she said, under her breath. "Gone!"

Frederic Lestrangle nodded.

"At two o'clock this morning."

"Why didn't they send for Joan?"

"They were afraid. Yesterday Barker discovered that it was scarlet fever in its most malignant form. They asked me to keep Joan away."

"No, no; Joan must go to them. We'll try to manage without her; for what could they do without Joan?" She gazed at him apprehensively. "You—you changed your clothes?"

"Every stitch. Don't worry about me, Claire."

"I am not worrying about *you*," she said, with a note of anger in her voice. "Come, Roderic."

"What, without my morning kiss?" asked the man, very gently.

"Men don't kiss, Uncle Frederic," said the child. "Joan says so. And I'm a man—the only one my mother has now. Joan says so."

"That's right, laddie," said his uncle, still gently. The mother's eyes had filled with tears. "Yet your father would have wished you to kiss me if he were here."

"Would he, mother?" asked the child.

Claire Lestrangle hesitated; then she deliberately conquered herself.

"Yes, dear. Kiss your Uncle Frederic."

With a bound the little fellow leaped into his

uncle's arms, and clasped him tightly about the neck. His mother, with bent head, walked past them, and in a moment the man released the child and placed him on the ground, when he immediately ran after his mother. As they went down slowly between the stately rows of flower-beds, it seemed to the man that Claire Lestrangle's slender, black-robed form drooped as might a flower languishing for lack of air and light. Her head was still lowered, and where the gleams of the golden sun touched it her hair glistened. Once she stopped to straighten her boy's cap, and he could see the delicate texture of her hand as the light played upon the rings she wore. They made a beautiful picture: that mother, gentle, fair, sweet, her hair like an aureole about her lovely head; the boy, her counterpart in miniature, with all the innocence of childhood allied to the tender beauty of his face. Frederic Lestrangle stood to gaze until they had passed from out his range of vision.

"How proud she is," he mused, "and how impenetrable! But she is too strong—I could admire her for that strength. Roderic must have been either blind or a fool to let suspicion enter his mind against her. She is a rare woman. If

her religion did not forbid it—her religion! It was once mine!—I would marry her—in spite of—”

He did not finish, but he turned into the house. At the top of the first flight of stairs he met a stout, motherly-looking woman—a comely woman, with black eyes and firm-set mouth, whose black hair was heavily streaked with gray. She seemed possessed of no uncommon intelligence—there was common sense and cleverness in her strongly marked features.

She stopped him.

“You’ve been to the village, Mr. Frederic?”

“Yes, Joan.”

“Perhaps that’s why they didn’t send me word—they thought you would bring it? How is my nephew?”

“Tommy died this morning.”

The words were a terrible shock. Her face paled, her bosom heaved, she grasped at the broad balustrade and stared.

“How did you find it out?”

“I went in to see him—he was dead then. They asked me to tell you to stay away, Joan; but Miss Claire wants you to go.”

“I must go—of course,” said Joan Lester.

She was very white. "They'll want me." The precaution, then, that had struck the mother-instinct struck home to Joan the faithful.

"What was it—do they know?"

"Scarlet fever, Barker says."

"And you were there—you wore that suit this morning, for I saw you leave the house. Change it before you see Master Roderic—it might be dangerous."

He drew down his brows at the tone.

"I can attend to that," he said, curtly, and passed on. "It is scarcely necessary to tell me to be careful—my responsibility is a grave one," he added then, looking over his shoulder at her.

Joan Lester, in spite of the sorrow that had come to her, grew ashamed. Frederic Lestrangle had, in common with his race, a charming sweetness of manner—doubly charming in him because of the wonted severity of his aristocratic countenance. He waved his hand at her now as he passed on, or she would have apologized to him for her harshness. As it was, he left her filled with a feeling of remorse and compunction.

But this was soon swallowed up when she had time to think of the misfortune that had befallen her brother's household.

Joan Lester was twenty-eight when her youngest brother—Tommy's father—was born, and even then she had been ten years at Lestrange Hall. Roderic and Frederic, the two boys, had grown up under her watchful eyes, and it was Joan who welcomed the happy Claire to her husband's home six years previous. She loved both men, with the love, almost, of a mother, and she loved Claire Lestrange for her sweetness and simplicity. Her own brother, on his marriage, had settled in the village below them "to be near Joan," and Joan led a thoroughly contented and happy existence until the first unhappiness came to Lestrange.

Some one had been predicting evil. More than one country bumpkin asserted that he had seen queer sights in the Lestrange woods, and "the gray lady," prophetic forerunner of disaster always, had been observed flitting from room to room, wringing her hands and moaning in the true ghostly way. Joan laughed all this to scorn. She had no nerves herself, she was brave as a lion. She wished, she said, that *she* could meet the famous "gray lady," and she'd soon make a ghost in earnest of her. To substantiate her statements that there was no misfortune fol-

lowing on the supposed appearance of the vision, she called attention to the happiness of Master Roderic and his young wife.

Only she of all in and about Lestrangle—save those immediately concerned—knew that something worse than death had happened to her young mistress.

No one knew how it began. There was no quarrel; there were no complaints. But gradually the husband began to ignore and slight his wife. Not before his servants, nor before the world—he was too much of a gentleman for that. But Joan knew, for Joan was part of the Lestrangle family. She knew more. She knew that Claire Lestrangle had begged on her knees for some explanation. She had asked him on his death-bed to tell her all, so that she might live to honor and cherish his memory. She had spoken wildly, for she loved him, and she felt that he was slipping away from her amidst a cloud of distrust. But even then, as always, he had turned his face away, dying, as he had lived with her the past two years, his countenance averted.

When his will was read, it was found that he had left his wife Claire an income of two

thousand dollars a year, to cease with her death. The rest of his property went to his little son. To his brother he left a handsome legacy, and in event of the child's death all was to revert to him. He appointed Frederic joint guardian of the child, and his wife was not to be permitted to take the child with her if ever she left Lestrangle. Her guardianship and care of her son ceased if she left her son's home. While she remained there, she was virtual mistress.

A cruel and an unjust will this was, but no one heard Claire Lestrangle say so. Once, when Frederic Lestrangle, annoyed by her cold manner, did something that conflicted with her orders, she looked him straight in the eyes.

"There is no provision in my husband's will for *your* residence here yet," she said, pointedly, scornfully. "This is my son's home, and as his mother I am mistress of it."

He had angered her, and she could be bitter. She had never liked Frederic Lestrangle, and since her husband's death she felt that she almost hated him. By every right her child was entirely hers. She had been a true wife, a faithful mother. She had loved her husband with all the strength of her heart, and, though she never

traced it, she blamed his brother Frederic in some way for the estrangement that had arisen between them.

One great comfort was left to her in her bereavement—the faithful Joan. Day and night Joan was with her mistress, and never left her. Day and night Joan's tender care surrounded the little boy, son of Roderic, the best loved of the brothers. But not even to Joan, in the sorest anguish of her heart, would Claire breathe the suspicion of her mind.

So she was, a widow two years, with the grief that time should have begun to heal still heavy upon her. She distrusted Frederic Lestrangle still, and his presence often galled her. But women have been martyrs for their children before now, and Claire Lestrangle bore her daily martyrdom in silence. None ever knew that sometimes she looked at her dead husband's brother with a mad impulse to give voice to her suspicions. Mentally she questioned him; mentally she accused him.

Perhaps this mental state of hers had effect upon him, for he, too, knew that, if it ever came Claire Lestrangle's day, she would not fail to use her power. Sometimes he grew afraid of the

strength behind those calm eyes and that calmer face. But not often. He was a strong man himself, in more ways than one.

CHAPTER II.

"IN GOD'S GOOD TIME."

AFTER giving some directions to Mrs. Angell, "who was all right, but had no more head than a pin," according to Joan, the good woman dressed herself and went in search of her mistress. She found her with Roderic at her favorite haunt, a beautiful artificial lake, in the center of which played a busy little fountain, and on the surface of which three lovely white swans sailed proudly.

Roderic, who felt the irksomeness of restraint very much at times, being possessed of the spirit of a true boy, sat straddle-legged across the broad rim, his mother holding him by the waist, while he shouted with laughter as he fed the handsome birds, so tame that they ate from his little fingers.

"Now, Joan!" he called out, as he saw her approaching them. "Now! See what mother lets me do?"

"Mothers can do lots of things Joan daren't,"

said the nurse, with a smile. It was a sad smile. She put her hand lovingly on his yellow head.

"Kiss Joan, dear. She is going away for a little while."

"Thought you said men didn't kiss? I told Uncle Frederic that, but mother made me kiss him."

"Not this morning!" said Joan, involuntarily.

"Why, yes," said Claire Lestrangle, struck by the note in her voice. "He kissed his Uncle Frederic this morning."

"And why not?" asked Joan, mildly enough. But she did not meet Claire Lestrangle's glance. "Now kiss nurse, lad."

He did so obediently.

"I know where you're going," he announced.

"Do you?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes. You're going to Tommy's. Tommy's gone."

Claire Lestrangle and Joan exchanged startled glances.

"He heard me say that to his uncle. If you wait a bit, dear, I'll tell you all about where Tommy's gone."

"I know," he answered, confidently. "It's Tommy's soul is gone. He'll have fine fun up

in heaven, won't he, mother? Never mind," brightening up, "maybe I can go some time soon."

"Pray God not," burst from his mother's lips.

"Would you leave your mother all alone?" asked Joan, quickly.

The child-face grew grave as child-faces will. He lifted his blue eyes and looked at his mother, and smiled—a smile that hurt her more than any words could have done. Much shaken, she turned to Joan.

"They will bury him at once, I suppose, on account of the danger of infection."

"Yes. As soon as it's over, I'll burn these things I have on here, and come home as soon as possible."

"Do," said Claire. "You know how helpless I am without you. Take care of yourself. The poor little mother must be tired out. Bring her some wine, and I'll send down a few things later with Harris. But be careful, Joan." She smiled her sad, winning smile. "In all that great house," she said, waving her delicate hand toward it, "my son and I have only you."

"God bless you, dear," said Joan; for indeed she was trusted friend, companion rather than

servant. "God bless you, and don't worry. Master Roderic is in no danger—look at the fine body, the strong limbs."

"Hush!" said Claire Lestrangle. "Tommy was even as he is."

And Joan went on her way, with much food for thought. No hint of evil would she permit to cross her honest mind about Frederic Lestrangle. She thought he had forgotten the danger of infection when he kissed the child, and that her words must have reminded him of his own lack of carefulness. But she was vexed.

"It would throw the poor soul into a frenzy if she even suspected such a thing," said Joan. "I am surprised at Master Frederic's carelessness. If the boy took the fever, he would never forgive himself."

She walked on briskly.

"People might say he wanted him to catch it," she said. "Well, no Lestrangle could be guilty of a thing like that. He might be tempted; but honor's in the blood."

Perhaps, in spite of herself, the thought worried her, for suddenly she paused.

"What good can I do Brother Richard, now that the lad is gone?" she said, half-aloud. "I

feel as if I'm wanted more at home. But it would look heartless, sure enough. No, I had better go."

Meanwhile Claire Lestrangle and her little son went on with their pleasant occupation, the mother resolving not to lose sight of the child while Joan was away. She was surprised at her own sense of helplessness—of dependence. She had not known she had been leaning so on Joan Lester.

"A truer heart never beat," she said, "than the faithful Joan's."

* * * * *

Frederic Lestrangle went to his own room, removed his clothing, and donned a gray morning suit. There was a curious expression on his face.

He was a tall man, with finely cut features, aquiline nose, well-closed lips, and an alert manner at times, altogether out of keeping with the general repose of his handsome face and the languid air which seemed to be habitual. His eyes were large and full, well shaped, extremely blue in color. He was a man more than ordinarily attractive. In appearance, height, and build, he greatly resembled his dead brother Rod-eric, save that his skin was much fairer, Rod-

eric having been quite dark. Often some play of hand or trick of expression made Claire Lestrangle start, so much did he remind her of her lost husband. This likeness accentuated her grief, and more than once had almost overcome her.

But for her innate and unconquerable mistrust of the man, they would have been excellent friends; for Claire was cultured and well read, and her brother-in-law a man of attainments. He had, in fact, often grumbled a little at the exactions which the guardianship of his brother's young child entailed. He had been planning a trip abroad for several years, and at the time of Roderic's unexpected death had had almost all his arrangements made.

When Claire returned now, stately, proud, calm as ever, no trace upon her face of the worry of her mind, her hand still holding fondly her little son's, Frederic Lestrangle sat upon the veranda. The morning mail had been delivered, and he was reading his: he always had a voluminous correspondence.

"Are there any letters for me?" asked Claire, more in an effort to be courteous than from any other reason.

He looked at her, smiling.

"A number, I believe, but they have been sent to your room." His glance became sharper. "When did you say your friend Mrs. Dacre was coming here?"

"On the fifteenth of next month. Her husband goes to Italy on the twelfth."

"I had forgotten. On—the—fifteenth— Let me see." He looked at the letter again. "I won't be able to stay that long, I'm afraid."

Her face expressed the astonishment she felt.

"Stay that long!"

"No. This is a letter from Professor Weyandt. You remember, he was starting out on a tour of investigation some years ago—"

She nodded. In spite of herself her sorrow still had power to blanch her cheek.

He gazed at her keenly.

"Just before Roderic's death," she said.

He nodded.

"Yes. He went to Syria. Now he's become acquainted with some Turkish chap who will bring him right into the heart of Mohammedanism. He wants to know if I'll go with him. The prospect is alluring."

She made no answer.

"You will probably be glad to see the end of me, Claire," he went on, in a softer tone.

She raised her blue eyes to his face.

"Why?" she asked.

"Ah—why!" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why—in heaven's name!"

"It is immaterial to me," she answered.

"Why should it be?" he asked, with sudden feeling. "Claire, I'm going away—I'm going to take this chance, for Weyandt is a savant, and a daring man. Claire, you hate me."

"No," she said; "I do not hate you, Fred-eric Lestrangle."

"And I tell you that you do."

She had perfect self-possession. On this ground he could not touch her: she was, apparently, absolutely without feeling.

"I do not hate you. At times you annoy me by a certain officiousness in regard to my son Roderic. Generally, I am perfectly indifferent. It matters nothing to me whether you go or stay."

He winced. Anything colder than that cold voice would have been impossible to imagine. It pierced him in a tender spot. He would rather have hatred from any one than indifference.

"Before I leave here," he said, gravely, then—and once again his manner, his accents, the sudden sobering of his features, brought a pang to her heart, they were so like her dead husband's—"before I leave here—there is a chance, you know, that I may never return—I should like to ask you an honest question."

"Ask it now," she said, still indifferently—"as well now as any other time."

"You think I am to blame for the estrangement that existed before his death between your husband and yourself—"

"Pardon me," she said. "You are becoming too personal."

An angry flame leaped into his blue eyes.

"Personal!" he said. "It is personal, indeed. You blame me for that, and for the disposition which he—"

She raised her head, and smiled into his face.

"Your pardon once more!" she said. "What my sentiments are no one need know. What your surmises are do not interest me. Ask me those questions in your own mind, and answer them there—if you please." She turned and walked toward the door, still taking her boy with her. When she reached it, she bent her face the

second time in his direction. "You will oblige me by never referring to this subject again. My husband was a good man—I leave whatever trouble arose between us to the mercy and goodness of God. In God's good time, he and I will stand face to face, and know the truth."

"In God's good time!"

Frederic Lestrangle sat still after the door closed behind his brother's wife and his brother's child. His lids were half-shut over his keen blue eyes, his lips set, his nostrils only showing that some strong emotion swayed him. "In God's good time," she had said, and the words struck him like a prophecy.

"What if it should be true?" he said, at last. "What if there be such a thing as God's good time, and the whirl of the wheel bring me back again to—what?"

His hand clenched upon his knee, clenching, too, the letters he held in his grasp.

"In God's good time," he said again. "I am thirty-six—I am young, strong, handsome—and disappointed in all that life holds dear. Disappointed in this," he looked about him, and included all Lestrangle in that half-shut, sweeping glance—"disappointed in this—and in this!"

He drew a letter from the three clenched in his grasp—a dainty letter, daintily written, penned in a delicate hand. He stared at it as if it were a living thing—and then, reaching into his vest-pocket, drew out a flat leather case. He opened it and laid it on his knee.

"There you are, *ma belle*," he said, in a thick voice—"my beautiful, indeed. But what has Frederic Lestrangle to offer you? as you ask me in this charming epistle of to-day. Love is an obsolete thing, and it will not pay the bills, eh, my dear? Not *your* bills, sweetheart."

It was a laughing face that looked up into his mocking one—laughing, irresistible, charming, with deep, beautiful eyes, pouting lips—a brilliant beauty well calculated to stir the pulses of a man like Frederic Lestrangle. One knew instinctively that those eyes were brown as velvet; that those lips were scarlet; that the whole face was of the brunette type, dashing, daring, altogether lovely—too lovely to look below the surface for qualities of mind and heart.

"You bit of gossamer," he said now, "you little, fluttering creature, one must pay for your gilded trappings if one would hold you. But you are worth it." He laughed aloud: his breath

came fast. "Fairly worth it, ma petite. If there be such a thing as God's good time, let it find us together."

He rose as he spoke, and put the case back again into his pocket. The shadow had left his forehead. His eyes were alight, his countenance pleasant to look upon. He looked satisfied with himself and with all the world.

* * * * *

Claire's moment had come when Frederic Lestrangle so openly brought up the subject she had often prayed he might.

Yes, since her husband's death Claire had asked that her husband's brother might one day ask her why she distrusted and disliked him. She had planned her answers. She meant to tell him why. She meant to show him her reasons, and prove beyond all doubt that it was he who had come between them, for money's sake.

She had had a clear case argued out. She would make him wince under her denunciations—she would tell him things he dared not deny.

Now, her ice-cold fingers clinging to her silent little son's, her limbs trembling, her head dizzy, now she went to her own room. She closed the door behind her, and sat down, conscious of

great weakness. Her boy did not speak—he was his mother's own son, and had inherited the repression of his father. He sat beside her until her limbs ceased trembling, and the color came back to her lips.

Her moment had come and gone, and she had said nothing beyond those few words. Why? Because, when others rose to her lips, some intuition warned her to refrain from uttering them. She was scarcely conscious of the words she had said, but she felt the ring of truth in them.

"In God's good time, he and I will stand face to face, and know the truth!"

She knelt suddenly.

"Come, Roderic, get down on your knees with mother—and say this after her: 'In God's good time, he and I will stand face to face, and know the truth.'"

Obediently the child repeated it, word for word he said it after her. She buried her face in her hands, and began to weep, and he sat up straight, the tears running down his little cheeks. But he did not betray his sorrow by even a sob, until his mother glanced up and saw him so, with the big tears on his baby face.

"My son, my little son!" she said, remorse-

fully. "Mother has made you sad! Oh, forgive mother, my own boy, forgive her—she did not mean it."

He looked at her solemnly.

"I hate my uncle," he said—"I hate him!"

"Roderic!"

"I do!—And when I'm a man and own this place, he shall leave it. I don't want his toys, nor his old kite—I'll send them back with Elizabeth just as soon—"

"Roderic dear!"

"Mother, you've cried. And you've made that prayer: 'In God's good time'—what was it, mother? See, I know part of it. But my uncle makes you unhappy, and you are too good to be unhappy—Joan says so. And Joan says no one ought ever to be sad, because God loves every one."

"Yes," she answered, humbly; "that is true. Joan is right. When God loves us, we should not be unhappy. You'll think of that, dear. That God loves you dearly, dearly, and that it is wrong to be unhappy? Forgive your poor mother."

"It is because Joan is not here—Joan would not let you cry," he said, with naive simplicity.

"Let me be Joan, mother, until Joan comes back."

She smiled at him.

"Think how big Joan is—why, she's grown up. And you're only a little boy—you're only my little Roderic."

He shook his head.

"I'm a man—Joan says so."

Joan, Joan, always Joan! How indispensable she was to both of them, thought the young mother, tenderly. And then she wiped her tears away, and wiped her son's round cheeks, and smiled at him, and told him stories and played all sorts of games, hoping in her heart that he would forget. He did not allude to the conversation until she put him to bed that night. He slept in the room adjoining her own, and as he said his prayers, and brought up his hand to make the sign of the cross, he stopped and looked at her strangely.

"In God's good time, mother—please let me say it."

A curious trembling seized upon her, so that her teeth almost chattered.

"In God's good time, he and I will stand face to face, and know the truth!"

Again he solemnly repeated it with clasped hands, and then crossed himself.

"It's a funny prayer," he said, as he got to his feet. "I don't know what it means, mother—but I want to say it, because it frightened Uncle Frederic to-day—and because it's your prayer."

She made no comment, because she saw then that the child was observant far beyond his years, and had extraordinary reasoning powers. She resolved that she would be more careful in the future of what she said and how she acted in his presence.

She kissed him good-night and went into her own room. A half-hour later she tiptoed easily to the door and listened to his regular breathing—she did not like to go away until she was assured that he slept. Then she called Elizabeth, and told her to stay in the room lest he should wake and call her.

"He has been rather excited and nervous to-day, and may dream," she said. "If he cries out, Elizabeth, go in to him."

The girl promised to obey her, and Claire Le-strange went on downstairs, the long train of her black dinner-gown sweeping after her, and

her white arms and throat shining through the meshes of the lace that covered them. As she passed Frederick Lestrangle's room, he, too, came out. He was followed by a short, thick-set fellow, whom he was evidently just about to usher to the door. He drew back as he saw his sister-in-law, screening the man with his body.

"You are late, as well as I," he said, with a smile. "I thought I should never finish—and was wondering if you were growing impatient."

"I had not heard the gong," she answered. "How long since it rang?"

"A good five minutes," he said.

She went downstairs, hastening her steps, for she was the soul of punctuality. For all his haste her brother-in-law did not stir until she had disappeared.

"A close shave, that," he said; "although it would not have mattered—she does not know who you are, and never will." He laughed significantly. "I hope our tour will be successful, and that we may succeed in coming out of this unscathed."

"I hope so," said the other. He had a peculiar accent, a rather refined accent, which was not in keeping with his somewhat rough features.

"I shall do my best to make it a success. I don't see any danger—it's too well planned."

"That may be. But the best-laid plans may go awry."

"Of course." They were at the door now, and Harris held it open.

"Give my regards to Professor Weyandt. Tell him I'll run to town next week and see him. We can then make out a list of necessities."

"Very well, sir. Good-night."

"Good-night, my man. Much obliged to you."

"No trouble, sir."

The short, thickset man moved down the broad steps, and Frederick Lestrangle went to join his sister-in-law at the dinner-table. He was brilliant of speech, and deliberately set himself to entertain her, putting aside all suspicions of unpleasantness. In this mood she could converse with him, for here his likeness to her husband was less apparent. Roderic Lestrangle had never opened his lips to say an unnecessary word. So she listened and replied. Later, at his request, she played some of his favorite music. He was fond of gay and light things that she could render mechanically.

Frederic Lestrangle's visitor did not go

straight down the path and out the broad gates as another visitor would. He walked slowly until close to them; then, seeing that there was no possibility of his being observed, he plunged abruptly into a side path, and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY JOAN HEARD.

ELIZABETH stopped Mrs. Angell at the head of the stairs.

"Have you seen the madam?" she asked.

"About a half-hour ago. She went for her usual walk."

"She should be back, then. Master Roderic was with her?"

"Master Roderic? Of course not."

"He must have been, Mrs. Angell. He is not in bed, and his clothes are missing. She must have dressed him herself, and taken him out."

"Perhaps. She's a bit worried since the fever's down below."

"Well, it won't do him any good to be running around on the wet grass," said Elizabeth with conviction. "Joan wouldn't have it, if she were here."

"Joan! 'Twould be a godsend if Joan never came back! You'd think she owned Lestrangle."

"Wouldn't you?"

Here followed a more or less interesting and altogether carping criticism of the absent Joan, who, if lenient in matters relative to herself, was uncompromisingly honest and just in the management of Lestrangle affairs. Not even in her absence dared they relax vigilance, for her eye was as sharp as a needle, and she would know at once what had been done and what had been left undone on her return. So they performed their work with as good grace as possible, alternately praising and abusing her. But whether they praised or abused, they knew what was expected of them, and they did it. In sickness, Joan was a mother—devoted in her attentions; in health, she was a mistress of discipline.

So, while they often said many things that sounded harsh, in their secret souls the small army of servants about Lestrangle knew that Joan was indispensable—that they could not do without her.

Claire Lestrangle's entrance into the house closed the interesting conversation. The cool morning air had brought a flush to her usually pale face, and her eyes were bright. At sight of her, Mrs. Angell went on about her business hurriedly.

“Elizabeth!” called the young mother before the girl could disappear. “Isn’t Roderic awake yet?”

“Why—madam—” began the girl, pausing in some astonishment.

“It’s after eight,” said Claire Lestrangle, looking at her watch. “We mustn’t let him get into bad habits—we’ll have him a lie-a-bed, first thing we know.”

She smiled, and was turning away when the maid came down the stairs with quick steps.

“Madam, madam,” she said, “I thought Master Roderic was with you. He is not in his room.”

Claire Lestrangle looked at her incredulously.

“My dear girl, what is the matter? Why, of course he must be.”

“But, madam, his clothes are gone: that is the reason—will you look, please?”

Claire ran quickly up, passed her, and into her boy’s room. The little white bed still showed traces of his small form: the pillow bore the impress of his yellow head. The room was in order—there was nothing awry, but the chair on which his clothes had been placed was empty.

“He could never have dressed himself,” said

Claire Lestrangle. "Call the servants. Call Mr. Frederic. Look for him. Tell every one to see if he is in the house."

And then a trembling, such as she had only once or twice before experienced, seized upon her: her lips turned white. For the moment she feared that she was about to faint. She sank into a chair, and sat staring at the little white bed. In a second, it seemed to her, the room was filled with curious faces. She heard Frederic Lestrangle's sharp voice, high with anxiety. Once he spoke to her, but she looked at him with a strange glaze in her eyes and shook her head. She could only hear his voice, she could not distinguish any of his words.

"Find him, find my son," she kept saying over and over. "Find my boy."

Later it turned to:

"Where is Roderic? Send for Joan. Tell Joan. He has gone after Joan."

They did—there was nothing else to be done. Joan's nephew had been buried the day before, and she was even then considering her return to Lestrangle. The news that little Roderic had disappeared was received by her with a scornful sniff.

"You don't know where to look for the child. He's a young scamp. Probably hidden among the bushes somewhere, laughing at the pack of you."

She said this to dispel the first horror that the news brought to her own motherly heart. A few moments sufficed to see her at her mistress' side. The shock of that strained face was as great as the news of Roderic's loss.

"Joan'll find him, dear soul," she said, gathering the black-robed figure in her arms. "Don't worry any more—Joan is here, and she'll find him."

But later in the afternoon she left her mistress—who had not touched a morsel of food that day—and went down to the library to Frederic Lestrangle. He, too, looked the worry and anxiety he felt. There were black circles under his eyes—he was ghastly.

"Joan, I am going to call the detectives in, and have a general alarm sent out from the police station," he said, abruptly. "The child has been stolen, probably, for a ransom."

"Send for a doctor," said Joan, briefly. "That girl upstairs will either go mad or die if something isn't done for her."

Frederic Lestrangle sank into a chair, groaning.

"What has come to the house?" he said. "Joan, I think the luck of the Lestranges has deserted them at last."

"Tut, tut," said Joan, sharply. "The child has to be found—it *must* be found, unless those that stole it want to have its mother's death on their heads."

"I will give any sum for his return," said Frederic. "I would beggar myself willingly. I would give anything and everything. Joan, you know the servants—do you think they could be bribed?"

"None of the servants," said Joan. "There's none of them is that kind. I know them all too well. Telephone for the doctor now, won't you, Mr. Frederic?"

"At once." He rose mechanically—then he pushed his fingers through his hair. "None of the servants, you say? Poor little lad—my poor, poor little lad! Where are you now? Joan, if I feel this way, what does poor Claire suffer?"

Tears were streaming down Joan's face—her bosom heaved convulsively. He looked at her

with a softened countenance, and, coming over to her, took her hand in his.

“And you, poor Joan, who have been mother to all the Lestranges—what do *you* suffer?”

“Don’t, Mr. Frederic,” she said, in a choked voice. “Let me keep brave while that poor soul upstairs needs me.”

“Yes, yes,” he said; “forgive me, Joan. You have been so long our bulwark of strength that I have forgotten you would need consolation. Dear old Joan!”

He looked at her affectionately, pressed her hand, and crossed the room to the telephone. Joan returned to her mistress.

* * * * *

That night Claire Lestrangle was stricken with brain fever, and the doctors—there were two of them—looked grave indeed. The police sent out a general detailed description of the missing boy, and one of their cleverest men came, and organized searching parties to scour all Lestrangle and the surrounding country.

They found Roderic, as Joan Lester had expected they would find him—dead.

It was the little lake that yielded up the ghastly secret. His mother had been in the habit

of going there herself to feed the swans, and it was Roderic's dearest delight to be allowed to accompany her. Without doubt, the detectives averred, he had followed her that morning—he was singularly precocious, and smart enough to dress himself—had played about the lake, waiting for her, and, becoming more venturesome through his familiarity with the place, had got up on the broad rim enclosing the lake. No one had been near to hear his smothered cry as the water covered him. And that was the end of the heir of the Lestranges.

Joan, heartbroken, with blinding tears falling from her eyes, identified the clothing—the sandals on the swollen little feet, the clothing, half-buttoned where his baby fingers could not reach—the clustering yellow curls—all that was left of Roderic Lestrangle's beauty, for he had been a week in the water. They laid him out in a tiny white casket, and kept vigil over him—Frederic Lestrangle, a broken man, who had grown worn and haggard under the strain, would have it so. The villagers came up to pay their last respects to the baby master, and to salute the new one. But they saw nothing of the latter. Frederic Lestrangle was not visible, and the tiny

coffin was closed. Upstairs, the white-faced mother lay, unconscious of her loss and near to death.

It was a house of mourning, indeed.

The boy was buried. The day after the funeral Frederic Lestrangle ordered the lake to be drained, the swans removed, the fountain destroyed—all traces, in fact, of the scene of the tragedy to be wiped from view. He seemed a thoroughly saddened man, and the fact that Roderic's death had made him master of Lestrangle carried little joy with it. He had nothing to say, but prowled about corridors and halls, hanging eagerly upon the doctors' bulletins. He summoned the greatest physicians he could find. Day and night he was ready to be called upon—even having telephone connections placed between his room and Joan's, which was next to his sister-in-law's, so that he might be apprised of the slightest change.

And Claire came back to life again—the life that held nothing now for her. From the very first moment she had dreaded the awful truth—its substantiation came with less crushing force than they imagined. She said nothing—only looked at Joan with anguished, tearless eyes.

"Thank God they killed him," was all she said. "For that much I am grateful. He is out of pain, my darling—and with his little playmate." She smiled—a smile more pitiful than loudest sorrow. "In God's good time, I too, shall go."

"Thank God they killed him!"

Poor Joan, filled with grief, her heart torn by a pain more keenly alive than was the sorrowful mother's at that hour of her dumb awakening, shrank as from a blow when she realized those words. "Thank God they killed him!" Poor Claire Lestrangle's intellect had not yet righted itself, thought the faithful Joan. But how she had looked—how she had spoken!

No, no, thought Joan, with quick self-condemnation, she would not harbor that suspicion. She was needed now as never in all her life she had been needed—what if the horror of the past ten days set her mind, too, roving amid such dreadful suspicions!

Claire Lestrangle fell asleep that afternoon—a quiet sleep, the first natural one since her boy's disappearance. Joan Lester felt safe in leaving her to the tender care of Elizabeth, who had seconded Joan and the nurses ably in her efforts to be of use. So Joan went out to breathe the

pure air of God's bright world for the first time in many days. As she passed Harris in the hall he spoke to her.

"Miller, the sexton, has been up here three times this week to see you," he said. "He wouldn't tell any one his business—he wanted to see Joan Lester. If you walk down along the road, you're sure to meet him now—it's around this hour he generally comes."

"He spoke to me some time ago about that roof of his—and in all the trouble I forgot to tell Mr. Frederic it needs repairing," said Joan. "I'll tell him to-day as soon as I come back."

She went on down the road, however, but there was no sign of the persistent Miller. She made her way into the village. The fever had disappeared, no new cases had been reported, they told her. Her brother and his wife seemed to have partly recovered from their loss, and she spent a not unpleasant half-hour with them chatting about affairs in general, touching but lightly on the tragedy of Lestrangle. On the way back she stopped at the church to say a few prayers for her dear lady, and on coming out met the sexton.

He was an old man—a pleasant-faced old

man, although his form was stooped and his head gray. He saluted Joan now—he and Joan were old friends—with a gravity foreign to his usual demeanor.

“How is Miss Claire?” he asked, after his greeting.

“She will get well,” said Joan, briefly. “Harris tells me you were up to the house this last week. I forgot all about that roof—but as soon as I go back—”

He waved his hand.

“The roof can wait,” he said. “What I’ve got to say has nothing to do with the roof. Joan Lester,” he went on, walking beside her, and forcing her to walk slowly to keep pace with him. “I’ve known you a long while—a good many years. Almost forty, I think.”

“Almost forty,” repeated Joan.

“You were a good friend of mine. It was you brought me to Father Duncan’s notice first. It was you helped make my life the pleasant one it is. Joan Lester, it was you closed my poor wife’s eyes in death, and helped us all over the bitter, bitter grief of it.”

Joan listened with some wonder.

“Why speak of this?” she said. “God puts

us here to help one another. A poor Catholic I'd be not to care for my own."

"You care for the stranger too," he said.

"Ah, well! It's no charity to do for one's own—it is for those who haven't the grace that is ours."

"True, true." He nodded several times without speaking. Then after a while he continued:

"To begin to tell the things you've done, and how you've done them in your own kind way, would be impossible. Tell me—you know that I respect and esteem you?"

"What are you driving at?" asked Joan, peremptorily. The gravity of the old man's face forbade her to entertain any thoughts of levity, though once or twice she glanced at him as if to read what was in his mind. "You have something to say?"

"And I'm coming to it," he said, imperturbably. "Do you imagine I'd do a thing would hurt you, Joan Lester, or cause you sorrow? Do you?"

"No," she said, with frankness; "I don't think there's a soul in the countryside would do anything to hurt a Lestrangle or one connected with them."

"True; but I'm talking of you, yourself," he said, with persistence.

"Or I, myself," she said, as gravely as he.

"Well, then, I have something to say to you that will, I think, startle you. It may cause you pain at that. I'm sorry to do it, Joan Lester, but I feel that it's my duty."

"Come, out with it," said Joan, half-smiling. "You can't tell me aught that will hurt me now, Hugh Miller. I've seen too much misery this last two weeks, to let anything annoy me."

"You remember," he said, then, "the day your nephew, little Tommy—one of God's angels now, with the poor lad up at Lestrange—you remember the afternoon they buried him? 'Twas the morning after that the young master disappeared."

"Yes," said Joan, "I remember."

"That morning, before any knew about the terrible happening up at the house, I was going through the yard on my way to the church. It was very early, and I stopped to straighten out a few plants, and to pick up some stray leaves that were scattered on the paths. When I got to little Tommy's grave, I noticed something queer about it. I've had the job of grave-digging

this last thirty years—I've dug every grave for the parish, and is it possible I wouldn't know my own work? So I stood looking down at that little grave, Joan Lester, and I swore to myself that it was not the work of my hands—I'd had naught to do with it."

"Well?" asked Joan, impatiently. "Well?"

"I studied it a while to myself—and tried to persuade myself it was all right, and put it out of my mind. But it wouldn't go, no matter how I tried. I pondered it and pondered it. I've heard some queer stories about the godless creatures that go about digging up bodies, and they haunted me. So that night—"

Joan Lester had grown pale to the very lips. Her eyes were glued to the ground—she could not raise them.

"That night," said he, "I went out myself, and dug up little Tommy's coffin."

Joan was trembling now.

"'Twas heavy enough, and as I went to lift it I laughed at my own foolishness. But something told me to keep on, and I kept on. I opened the coffin. I found bricks in it that they took from the yard yonder, but no body. Little Tommy was gone."

"In God's name!" breathed Joan Lester.

"In God's name I'm telling it to you, Joan. The casket held bricks—that was all. I put it back again, filled in the grave, and sat down on the next one to think. To keep it to myself was the first thought—but how could I do that? 'Twould torment me forever. To tell it to the poor father and mother would make them fret a thousand times more, and what the grave covers is to be forgotten, or we couldn't live. I've realized the goodness of God in that. So I worried and worried till I thought of you, and I knew that you'd know what was best to be done."

"Let me think," said Joan, hoarsely— "Let me think."

There was a horror in the ghastly paleness of her face, a fear in the light that had leaped into her eyes. Joan had been stunned before by sorrow and heartburning, but she felt that she could scarcely bear this.

So they went on without a word. At last, as they were near Lestrangle, Joan spoke to him.

"You were a wise man," she said. "I'm glad you told me this. We'll tell it to some one else—Father Duncan. You go there to the rectory this

afternoon, and wait for me. Do another thing: Write out that story as you've told it to me, word for word—how you saw the grave, how you recognized it had been tampered with, how you opened it and found the stones—that's all. And Father Duncan and I will sign that paper, and put it somewhere that it will be safe."

So spoke Joan, decisively. She hardly knew what prompted her to suggest this, but that she was a woman used to decisive action. She wanted to have a grasp of things. She was a just woman, too, and she prayed, with all her heart, to be kept from judging others.

"Where are you going now?" she asked, as she saw that Miller made no offer to return.

"You may remember old Silas, who lived with his grandson in the hut at the end of Lestrange road?"

"Yes," she answered.

"He left the place—ran away a week ago, and left his grandson behind him."

"Anthony? The child he seemed to be so fond of?"

"So they say. I am going down there now to see if it be true."

"And if it is?"

“Richard Lester told me to fetch the child back with me.”

“Ah!” said Joan, with a flush to her cheek, “little Tommy was quite fond of Anthony.”

“Perhaps that is it,” said the old man, reflectively—“perhaps that is it. But Dick Lester is a good man—and an honor to the parish.”

Joan nodded.

“It’s a good thought—God will bless him, now that his own is gone,” she said, briefly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WANDERINGS OF SILAS WASDALE.

It took poor Miller—he being more handy with a spade than a pen, as he said—the better part of the afternoon to draw up the statement as Joan had bidden him. So that he was not long waiting at the rectory gate when Joan appeared, breathless with hurry.

“I had a hard time getting away,” she said. “I hope you’ve not been here long?”

“About a half-hour,” said the man.

“And you’ve done as I bid you?”

“Word for word.”

“’Twill keep your memory untarnished, maybe, when you are gone,” she said. “Let’s get it to Father Duncan, now, Hugh, for I’m in sore straits to be back again. Miss Claire can’t bear to have a soul near her but myself. How about Anthony—did you bring him back with you?”

“No, I didn’t. ’Twas a lie they told—I thought Silas would never leave that child behind him. He was too fond of him.”

"Fond of him!" sniffed Joan, scornfully. "He beat him enough, to show his fondness, then. It isn't all love that makes him hold on to him. I don't believe in beating myself—at least, not that much of it."

"The child seemed to care for him."

"Oh, yes; he could be kind in a rough way. Good-afternoon, Father Duncan," as the priest himself appeared in answer to their ring. "I hope we're not disturbing you? We won't be long."

"That's all right," said the priest, heartily. "How is Miss Claire? I was just going to Le-strange—I'll be back with you, Joan."

"That's good," said Joan; "but I think we've got something to tell you will give you a start. As for Miss Claire—she's just the same as she was yesterday. God would be merciful to take her."

"Don't say that, Joan," said the priest, gravely. "She could scarcely be spared."

"I'm thinking it, Father—I might as well say it."

He did not reply.

"Hugh here has a queer tale to read you. He's a bit disturbed about it, as well he may be, seeing

that he's an old man, liable to die off any day. He wrote it down, and will have you and me sign it, so that, in case the thing is brought up after he's dead and gone, there'll be no one can say a word against him."

Her eyes were fastened steadily on the priest as she spoke these words, and, although puzzled, he understood that there was more to the speech than was conveyed on the surface. Much gratified at Joan's clever way of explaining the matter, Hugh, without preamble, extended the written sheets of paper. Father Duncan turned toward the light, and began to read, while Joan and the sexton waited.

The priest made no comment: perhaps the expression of Joan's face warned him not to do so.

"You swear that this is the truth?" he asked, when he had finished.

"I swear to every word of it," said Miller.

He signed it then in their presence, and Joan Lester and Philip Duncan affixed their signatures.

"Let it rest between us," said the priest, gravely. "We'll make no fuss about it at all. It will surely come out in time—and, in any event, you are blameless."

“Joan Lester has the head and brains of a man,” declared Miller, admiringly.

“Many a man might be glad of them,” said the priest. “Now, Joan, if you’re ready—”

“All ready, Father.”

He took his hat and his walking-stick, and followed her out into the road.

They walked slowly. At the corner Hugh Miller left them, and then Joan, for all her hurry, did not increase her pace. Instead she talked earnestly, and in a positive fashion, laying her hand more than once on the priest’s arm to emphasize her words.

“So Joan Lester has a new mission,” he said, with a half-smile, as he turned in the great gates of Lestrange. “Poor Joan! If people did one-quarter of the good you do, this world would be a paradise.”

“Nonsense, Father,” said Joan, but she did not look displeased. “You agree, then, that I may be right?”

“I agree that you may be right—yes. But possibility is not to be admitted. You must prove you’re right.”

She hesitated.

“God knows,” she said, “but I am afraid. I

would almost wish that I am wrong. I hope time will show that I am wrong."

"I too," said the priest, gravely. "Save that God knows best." Then he added, looking at her in a friendly fashion: "Every morning of my life I shall remember you and your new mission, Joan."

"Thank you, Father," she answered with gratitude.

* * * * *

When "old Silas," as the villagers of Le-strange—who disliked and avoided him—called him, made up his mind to move, he did not hesitate long about the manner of his going. There was nothing in his wretched little cabin, with its bare two rooms, that was worth transporting. So that, when he placed the tattered red cap with its drooping tassel on little Anthony's head and roughly bade him follow him, he was taking with him the only thing that had ever been of value—his grandson.

More than once the little feet loitered on the lonely way, for he was not used to traveling long distances. But when Silas spoke to him he seemed to shiver as with fear and strive to keep up with the man's longer stride. At last, how-

ever, his strength failed him, and not even fear could help him on. He sank to the ground, and with a muttered rough word—from which the little fellow shrank as from a blow—Silas stooped and raised him in his arms. He was a light weight, and Silas pretty strong for all his three-score years and five, so that they were able to travel many a mile before the old man's arms grew tired. And then he made the child climb up on his shoulders, pickaback fashion, and hold him about the neck. Pretty soon the grasp of the small arms relaxed, and the weary boy fell sound asleep in his strange position. The man smiled grimly, but not unkindly, and tightened his hold.

“’Twill be a long day before you’re able to do as much for me, my lad,” he said, with sour humor, and kept plodding on in the selfsame way.

He put many and many a mile between him and Lestrange. At night they slept in neighboring farmhouses; in the daytime they trudged along, assisted now and then by an obliging farmer who gave them a lift in his wagon. Through prosperous cities and towns far more populous than Lestrange had been they went—

“the beggar man and the child,” as the people called them at first. But Silas Wasdale was no beggar, for he had paid his way cheerfully enough, and had no word of objection at any price they asked for his necessities, nor did he solicit alms. In one of the cities he went into a general store, and bought an outfit for himself and Anthony that made them both appear more respectable. So that after that they were not looked upon as beggars, but as a respectable old workman and his grandson—the man forced to leave the town in which he had lived because the mills were shut down, and who was going now in quest of employment to one who was his friend. People made him welcome, for he was none so bad-looking, and gave him shelter gladly when they heard this plausible story.

It seemed to be Silas Wasdale's whole ambition to put as many miles as he could between himself and the place he had left—and he succeeded, for no one in Abneyville had ever heard the name Lestrangle. The night he reached Abneyville the child's face was strangely flushed and his eyes bright with fever. He seemed so ill that Silas would not wait to penetrate farther into the village, but knocked for admission at the

door of a house singularly resembling the poor hut he had left behind him at Lestrange. The face that blinked out at him was very much like his own, also, and, when he stepped across the threshold, the candle almost fell from the other man's grasp.

"Silas!" he said.

"How do you do, Brother Bernard? I am come to stop with you a bit—and I have brought with me the only one left of my son Anthony's children."

"You are welcome, brother," said the other, "you and Anthony's son."

"How is Susan?" asked Silas, carelessly.

"The same as ever," was the reply. "Susan, Susan, woman—here is brother Silas back from his wanderings, come in to stay with us this night."

"No need to tell me how long I am to stay," said Silas Wasdale, with a sour smile. "If I stay, I'll pay my score; and if I don't like my lodging, I shall go to where I will like it better."

"You have fared well, then?" asked the other, cautiously.

"So well that you would begrudge me my good

fortune," answered Silas. "Ah, Susan! I'm glad to see my brother Bernard's wife. You have not changed for the better in twenty years."

"Nor has your tongue, I'll warrant," was the caustic rejoinder of the woman who now put in an appearance from the inner room. "It's like a brother of Bernard Wasdale's to come routing honest folk from their beds at this ungodly hour."

"Hist, woman! He'd rather come to his own than to an inn," said Bernard.

"True—for the inn demands a reckoning," returned Susan Wasdale. She was a bent old woman, clad in a faded calico wrapper, and with a whisp of gray hair drawn into an unsightly knob on the back of her head. Her eyes were sharp and glittering, and of a color hard to describe. She stood now, repellant of face, with arms akimbo. She had no use for men who came as she suspected Silas Wasdale had come.

But Silas dove down into his pocket and drew up a coin—and at sight of the color of it her eyes sparkled.

"This will change your tune, good sister Susan," he said. "Make a hot drink for the child, and get me something to eat. My head

is swimming from lack of food—and the child is sick.”

“That he is,” said Susan, as she deftly pocketed the coin. Stooping down, she took the child in her arms. “’Tis a fever that will cause his death if something isn’t done for him. Was there a sickness in any of the towns you passed through?”

“I don’t know,” said Silas, almost sullenly. “If there were, I think I have it, too. I am chilled to the bone, and yet my face is burning. Get me something to drink and to eat—perhaps it will pass away.”

But it did not pass. The next day old Bernard Wasdale went in to the town for a doctor, and brought him out with him. The physician found that both child and man had contracted a malignant fever, although the man’s was only a slight attack. He would be around in a few days, said the doctor; but the child—

He was not sure of him. If he had parents, it would be better to send for them. But he had no one, said Silas Wasdale. His father had been lost at sea, and his mother had died giving him birth. There had been four other children, but they had drifted away. Only he had taken the

baby, because it seemed a shame to have one so small and helpless dependent upon strangers.

It was this terse account, probably, that made the good man take such a tireless interest in the case. Twice a day saw him trudging along to the old hut, and when the crisis came he never left it. He listened to the child's ravings, and his heart was very tender, for he felt that Silas Wasdale really loved his grandchild.

Almost by force the boy was pulled back from the gates of death, and until all danger was past the doctor kept up his unremitting care. When it was over, Silas asked him for his bill, but he laughed it aside.

"We'll count that paid," he said. "I guess you can ill afford unnecessary expense. Buy the lad some clothes with it when he is able to run about, and send him round to see me."

"I wish he'd let us have the child," he said to his wife, that night.

"Edward!" she exclaimed. "With five of our own!"

"My dear, he'd fit splendidly between Jessie and Regine. It seems odd to see two girls following each other," said he, with a twinkling eye.

"You have three boys," she said. "I think

you'd adopt every stray child came along, as well as every stray dog. I don't mind the dogs, although you have a yard full now. But I draw the line at children."

"You'd give to a dog what you'd refuse a child?" he asked.

"What nonsense! Aren't five children enough to keep in clothes and at school? Why, Edward—you are surely joking!"

"I'm not, my dear. I really meant it. But of course you're right."

He sighed and changed the subject. In the course of a week Silas Wasdale's grandson was able to sit up, and he began to take a languid interest in things. The doctor brought him some oranges and a picture-book, and he was gratified to see how eagerly Anthony ate the one and pored over the other.

"Have you come any great distance?" he asked Silas, when he was ready to leave.

"Yes. The mills in which I was employed shut down. I came from Lowell originally—I'm going back again. A man there has promised me work."

It was the story he had been repeating in every town—it came mechanically now. He had actually persuaded himself that it was true.

The doctor stared reflectively at the man through his glasses. He was not a bad-looking man; hair iron-gray, face seamed and wrinkled, his skin the ruddy hue of a man used to outdoor work. He did not look like one who would care to live indoors or had been accustomed to an indoor life.

"You are going on, then?" asked the physician.

"Just as soon as the child is better," answered the man.

"It seems a pity not to have the child in a good home," said Dr. Nugent, turning his face toward the bed. "I suppose, now, you wouldn't like to leave him here?"

"Susan and Bernard would hardly like him trapesin' round them," said Silas Wasdale, grimly.

"No; I shouldn't suppose they would," said Dr. Nugent. "I have five of my own—he'd be welcome to his bite with them."

"He's not a bad-looking child," said Silas Wasdale; "and he's my Anthony's youngest. If he was ugly and crooked, he'd be the same to me—but he wouldn't be that to other people."

Dr. Nugent read rejection and rebuke in those words.

"My dear man," he said, hastily, "I daresay

you're right. The child's face does attract me, and doubtless he is more to you than he could ever be to me. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me," said Silas Wasdale. "I'm not the kind that's easy hurt. When I have to say a thing, I say it, and done with it."

"That's right," said Dr. Nugent. After a few more words he went away.

What, therefore, was his astonishment a week later to discover that Silas Wasdale had left his brother's to continue his journey, leaving the little boy behind him.

"He didn't think the lad was well enough to travel yet," said Bernard to the surprised doctor. "So we're to send him on to him as soon as he's settled. We'll hear from him, he says, in a week or ten days."

"Meanwhile," put in Susan Wasdale, sharply, "We're to have an eye on the child and take good care of him, and keep him in his proper place, and away from them that would be putting nonsense into his head—trying to steal him from his own."

"My good woman," said the physician, "he would belong to no one this day if I had not exerted all my efforts to preserve his life. I gave him the care and attention I would give my son.

So, if you mean that word stealing for me, I'll thank you to take it back again."

"Well," she muttered, "you wanted him."

"Not from those that are entitled to him," he said, "which you are not. I'll keep a watch on this child, remember, and, if anything happens to him in your care, I'll have the town authorities put in a word or two."

He spoke hotly, turning on his heel then, and leaving the miserable dwelling. But he had cowed even the bad-tempered Susan. That night he told the whole story to his patient wife.

"My dear Ned," she admonished, raising a warning finger, "what was it I said to you the other day?"

"Oh, I know; but if you saw the child, dear, you wouldn't blame me. He's like a flower—a beautiful flower. The most wonderful eyes! Such a refined face! Features almost classically perfect! Limbs that are models!"

"Ned Nugent," she said, solemnly, "you have three as handsome boys as ever lived."

"Felicia Nugent, I know it. Don't worry. But just listen. Bring him some fruit yourself tomorrow, and take a look at him. Do, there's a treasure of a woman. Now, I'm not asking you

to do anything terrible, am I? Just take a look at him."

"What in the world is the use?"

"My dear, only go to *see* him. Is that anything?"

"No—o—o," she admitted, reluctantly.

"You know, I'd like you to come home and say, 'Well, Ned, I don't blame you.'"

She put her hand up to his brown head and pulled it down toward her.

"You know how much I'd *blame* you," she said. "I firmly expected to see that child walk in here with you the other day—and was a bit disappointed that he didn't. Now that it's all over, I'm glad that you were wise—that you didn't give in to temptation—for I should never have been able to resist."

Dr. Nugent looked at her.

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid I did try to get him—only the grandfather wouldn't give him up."

"I thought so." Then she kissed him on the forehead. "Neddy, your heart's too big for your body—and you could hide every penny you make in a corner of it."

"I'm sorry," he said, remorsefully, "but I can't ever remember, Felicia."

CHAPTER V.

THE COMING OF HELEN DACRE.

FREDERIC LESTRANGE, as soon as his sister-in-law was on the road to recovery, felt that he had done everything that could be expected from a man in his position. Urgent letters came from Professor Weyandt every day. The savant had already delayed his departure a week, for Frederic Lestrangle had written to him begging him to make all arrangements for him as he was making them for himself, and that he would positively join him when the time arrived. So, now, after the professor's last somewhat curt note, Frederic Lestrangle begged Joan to ask Claire to see him.

Inexpressibly sad, inexpressibly fragile, looked the young woman who raised her pale face to greet him on his entrance into the room. The door of the inner apartment stood open—and through it could be seen the small white bed which had been the dead boy's, arranged as if its owner were but away for a brief spell, and would return to

occupy it. The chair to which Claire Lestrangle motioned her husband's brother was placed so that a full view might be obtained of that room which would never again know the joy of her son's presence. Frederic Lestrangle sat down. On his face there was an expression of keenest sympathy. He glanced through at the little bed, and started—then he brought his blue eyes to her white countenance.

“Is it well always to have that sight before you?” he asked, in a softly modulated tone. She followed the gesture of his hand, and smiled.

“It is my only comfort,” she said. And the sound of her voice startled him.

When her husband died, the sense of the injustice which he had done her dulled the keener edge of grief, though, paradoxical as it may seem, this injustice helped to keep that grief alive. She had truly loved Roderic Lestrangle. She had esteemed and respected him when she married him, and this respect and esteem had grown into the love that is a wife's dearest treasure—a love hallowed and sanctified by the coming of their child. Old memories were sweet. Her husband's joy when Roderic was born, his tenderness, his outbursts of affection, were cherished in her heart of

hearts. On this love a cloud had fallen. Through no fault of hers he had turned away from her. Through no fault of hers he had died with the secret of his estrangement hidden in his breast.

But she had had her child, her Roderic. The child looked to her for comfort, and she poured out the injured tenderness of a true woman's soul on the beautiful golden head. The maternal instinct kept hope alive in her—love for her dear son helped to carry her over the dreadful fact of his father's death.

But now he, too, was gone, and she was left—this time without hope. Her boy, whom she had watched growing into a beautiful childhood from helpless infancy; her boy, who had looked at her so gravely and so wisely; her mischievous boy, as full of pranks as any healthy lad might be; her child, who had been hers, and hers alone—hers exclusively, in feeling and in thought—he was gone, and she was left.

No wonder, then, that Frederic Lestrangle looked at her curiously. She had lost something from her life which would never return to it.

“Claire,” he said, much moved, “believe me, no one feels more for you in this sad bereavement than I.”

She bent her head: her eyes were on his face, studying him, but he bore the scrutiny well.

"I dared not leave—I would not leave until assured of your safety. Now that it is assured, Claire, I am going on my journey—long anticipated, often deferred, but here at last. I do not know how long I shall be away," he hesitated.

"It is to be a honeymoon as well."

"You are to be married?"

"Yes. Very quietly—to Judith Howard."

She was silent a few moments—then, without altering her tone, she said:

"I wish you both great happiness."

"Thank you, Claire."

He waited—when she did not speak again, he plunged rapidly into speech.

"There are many places my wife can not accompany me; but she is a daring spirit, and will risk much to be with me everywhere. We will be away two years at least. Yesterday Helen Dacre wrote to me. She inquired about you, asking me as a personal favor to her to tell her how you were, and if the presence of a friend now would not bring you relief. She had refrained from coming before, although she had intended to stay with you from the fifteenth of last month,

you remember. I answered that there was no doubt that her visit at this time would prove beneficial, and you will probably see her here tomorrow. Have I done right, Claire?"

"I am in no condition to entertain visitors," said Claire, briefly.

"Helen Dacre will ask or expect very little attention."

"I know that. But I am leaving Lestrangle."

"Leaving Lestrangle!" He looked at her in undisguised astonishment. "Claire, I did not anticipate such an action—at least not yet. Judith and I will not come back for some years, and I doubt very much if she will care to settle down here. The Hall will scarcely be to her taste save during the summer months. I had hoped that you would remain here, and act as chatelaine."

"You are most kind and thoughtful," she made answer, gravely. "But Lestrangle is yours, and I do not care to remain in it."

"Claire, you are unjust—you are cruel to allow a prejudice—"

She smiled.

"Do not call it that. Say, rather, that the associations would overwhelm me. The sudden death of my husband, the tragic death of my

child! It would not be natural if I cared to stay here where calamity—and such calamity!—has overtaken me. Besides that, I was not born a Lestrangle, and perhaps have none of the feeling for the place which you have and my dead husband had.”

She might have been uttering the merest platitudes, so evenly the words came. And her eyes never left his face, or, if they did, but glanced away and came instantly back again. He was growing restless under their steady gaze.

“I came to offer you Lestrangle and all that it contained for as long as you chose to keep it,” he said.

“A thought worthy of my husband’s brother,” she answered; “but I must leave Lestrangle.”

“Can I help you?” eagerly. “Is there anything I can do?”

“No. I am not going far—only a little bit above here. I have had old Silas Wasdale’s hut torn down, and a house erected—a small house, but large enough for me. It will be completed shortly, and until it is finished I ask your hospitality.”

His face was cold and hard as he rose to his feet.

“For some reason of your own you persist in treating me as if I had done you a grievous wrong,” he said. “I am sorry that you do so; but I shall make no further efforts at conciliation. Do as you please: do as you think best. If ever your husband’s brother can benefit you, I beg of you not to hesitate to call upon him.”

With those words he walked quickly to the door, opened and shut it as quickly, and went out. Claire Lestrangle sank back in her chair. The interview, the sight of the man whose very presence so cruelly tried her, had almost exhausted her strength. So she sat with closed eyes and limply folded hands.

Her brother-in-law left Lestrangle that afternoon. He did not trouble her to say farewell—merely penciled a few words on one of his cards and sent it up to Claire with Joan.

“Mr. Frederic’s bride-to-be is evidently not a Catholic,” said Claire, listlessly; for the card, in addition to saying good-by, conveyed the information that the writer and Judith were to be married at Judith’s residence, the second day following, by a Reverend Mr. Adams.

“No one here knows aught about her,” said Joan Lester. “Did you ever see her, Miss Claire?”

"Occasionally," was Claire's reply. "She did not strike me as being overfond of any religion; but in society there is no way of knowing much about that. She is an extremely beautiful young woman; in fact, if it is possible, too beautiful."

"And Mr. Frederic is marrying out of his own faith!" said Joan, with great regret. "I hoped, if he got one of his own kind, 'twould bring him back again. Mr. Frederic hasn't been to his duty in years."

"Poor, faithful Joan," said Claire, with an infinitely pathetic smile; "and I suppose you worry over him as if you were his mother."

"I do," said Joan, frankly. "Mr. Frederic may go wrong, Miss Claire, but honor's in the Lestrangle blood. He'll have to come right in the end, no matter how wrong he goes."

She spoke so confidently, and with such faith, that Claire looked at her keenly.

"Are you positive he is a Lestrangle?" she asked. "It seems hardly possible he and my husband were at all related."

"They were greatly alike," said Joan—"almost like twins. And I held him in my arms a moment after he was born."

"You mean in looks," said Claire, absently. "I

did not allude to his looks. There he is fearfully like Roderick."

Joan knew and dreaded the blank far-away expression that settled down on Claire's face now. It came very often, and she would sit for hours in silence, doing nothing, uttering no word. Nothing could rouse her—no speech of Joan's could bring her to herself, until the fit of abstraction passed. Although Claire did not know it then, it was this passive state of mind which saved her reason. Her faculties were numbed, her bodily strength exhausted. So that now, when she seemingly slipped away from her surroundings, nature was, in reality, trying to repair the effects of the shock that she had suffered.

The afternoon passed quietly as usual. Joan had wheeled her mistress' chair into the low bay window. Autumn was just departing, and the golden glow that it had left behind still lingered on wood and field. Unconsciously Claire loved the peaceful scene; unconsciously her mind received it and enjoyed it, and it calmed her.

By-and-by, through this absence of feeling, the knowledge that she was not alone struck home to Claire. It came as an annoyance at first; then she looked down at a woman's figure sitting be-

side her with a distinct sense of pleasure. The graceful form was strangely familiar. And the face—Claire looked at that face, studying it. A grave face, gentle, noble. The eyes a tender gray; the lips red and softly curved; the skin a creamy white; the brows and lashes a warm brown like the mass of hair piled above the temples. With her chin in her hand, Claire's eyes came back from contemplation of the unknown, and dwelt almost with fondness on that splendid face—not splendid in its beauty, but splendid in its womanhood.

No one save Helen Dacre would have known how to steal in softly on Claire's strange moodiness, and bring her back to the present in such a loving way. She said no word; she did not need to speak, for she was versed in the art of consolation. Her presence was the harbinger of joy.

So Claire, with interest dawning in her weary eyes, leaned down to the tender face below her, was clasped gently in softly closing arms, was kissed with those gentle lips, and then as softly released again—not a movement breaking the hush or peace of that holy moment when the heart of a loving friend sprang up to meet the need of love she saw in her friend's eyes.

Claire sat quietly, looking down at her. After

a while Helen Dacre took her hand and fondled it between her own strong palms.

"When did you come, Helen?"

"An hour ago, dearie."

She had a voice to match her face, musical, low, and yet with an undercurrent of strength. She would be able to sing tender songs—pathetic little love songs or gentle lullabies, one might imagine, listening to that low, sweet voice.

"I came along the Lestrange road," she went on; "and at the end of it I saw the nicest little villa, or château, or chalet—it would be hard to give it a name, it is so quaint. I was thinking I would like to buy it when it was finished. But Joan told me, while I enjoyed a cup of tea with her, that it is yours."

Claire listened, soothed by the refined accents, and only gradually taking in the meaning of her words.

"Yes, it is mine," she said, vaguely.

"Your architect is of a unique sort," went on Helen Dacre. "It is low, and it is high. The view from the little tower or turret will be beautiful. The rooms are so high, so delightfully high! And so well laid out! Claire, I shall help you to furnish it."

"Do it all for me," said Claire, indifferently.

"Oh *no*; that would be presuming on your good nature. I shall go out again to-morrow, and select my own room."

"If you would but stay with me," said Claire. "Do not go away again, Helen?"

"No, dear—not unless you come with me."

"How long is Wilfrid to stay in Italy?"

She did not notice the quick change of expression on that bright and charming face.

"I do not know how long," she said. Claire looked at her with a question dawning in her eyes.

"I thought you two loved each other too much to be separated."

"We do," said Helen Dacre; "but we have work that must be done, and we could not leave it together, dearie. So Wilfrid had to go alone."

"Had to go?" Claire was rousing to curiosity, rousing to interest in life.

"Yes. If both went, the work we are doing would have suffered severely. So we made the sacrifice. I stayed to take care of it, and Wilfrid went on his pilgrimage. But I'll tell you more of that later," brightly. She gazed at her critically. "How fair and lovely you still are, Claire. Your skin, which used to be the envy of every

girl who knew you! And that pile of yellow hair!" She reached upward and touched it with her hand. "You will never grow old, Claire."

"No?" asked Claire. "I do not worry. Age has little terror for me."

Helen Dacre still kept her eyes upon her.

"I think you mean it, Claire."

"Yes," said Claire, listlessly, "I do. Old age, time, nothing has any terror for me now. I am bereft of all a woman can hold dear."

She spoke the last words scarcely above a whisper. The listless look gave way to one of intensest anguish.

"Yet God has given you a treasure to equal mine."

"You mean?"

"Our children play together at the blessed Mary's knee."

It was a daring speech, and on it Helen Dacre risked much that she had planned for Claire Le-strange's good. The widowed mother stared down at her, and Helen, struggling up to her knees, clasped both her hands fervently.

"My Claire, we have work to do in this world, you and I. Only mothers who yearn in vain for the clasp of loving little arms can do it. Only

mothers who seek in vain for the pressure of loving little lips can do it. You and I, Claire."

Slowly the great tears gathered in Claire Lestranger's eyes; slowly they began to course down her pale face.

"Wilfrid has gone to Rome on a pilgrimage, and thence he goes to Lourdes. He will die this year if God does not intervene to save him. Only a miracle can restore him to health. But the work we have been doing together called him, and he would not seek even the miracle of God's gift of health if it meant the children's loss. So I promised faithfully to take up his duties, and to perform them at whatever cost to myself."

"What is this work?" asked Claire Lestranger, in a low tone.

"Not now," said Helen Dacre. "Wait."

The silence that fell then lasted until the shadows began to deepen in the room. Claire, in her habitual attitude, her chin resting on her slender hand, stared out at the trees and the blue sky that was their background. The other hand rested softly on Helen's shoulder. After a while, as comprehension of her friend's words came to her, her hand stole softly upward until it rested on her head.

"Poor Helen," she breathed then; "my poor, poor girl."

"Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth," said Helen Dacre, softly.

"And in God's good time, He will repay!"

The words came with energy, with force. Roused to life, Claire Lestrangle drew herself erect, her bosom heaving.

"Helen!" she said, passionately, "I do not desire revenge—I have no wish to wreak vengeance. But I am willing to leave it to God. I know, as surely that there is a God, that, when the time is ripe, He *will* repay. That is no sin, surely, to be convinced of that. I wish no evil to a living soul, but to know that God has taken vengeance into His own hands."

"My dear," said Helen, soothingly, "God always does. And it is no sin to be convinced of it if we are sure that there is no wish for it on our part. Our suffering counts but little, Claire, dear. *It is how we bear our suffering.*"

And with those great and wise words, again a silence fell.

CHAPTER VI.

JONATHAN AND DAVID.

WILFRID DACRE returned the following year from his pilgrimage—not entirely well, the doctors said, but with what they called a new lease of life. The progress of the disease had been arrested, and they, who had predicted death for him the preceding year, now said that he might live five or six, or even seven years. He visited at Claire Lestrangle's beautiful little home, and when he left it Claire accompanied him and Helen to the city.

Claire's life had always been practically a sheltered one, so that now, in her twenty-seventh year, there was much in the world which she did not recognize even by name. Of pure and lofty temperament, inclined to estheticism, the sights she saw when Helen Dacre led her through the rooms of the residence she and her husband had bought in order to facilitate their work shocked her.

For these two were quietly and earnestly striving to reach those souls which could not be gained save by personal and individual contact. They had

placed themselves under the direction of the priest in whose parish they resided. Yes, resided, for here, amid the want and misery of a great city, they lived in their own home, quietly and evenly pursuing their way. No one was too old or too case-hardened to be refused pity here. Wilfrid Dacre himself met old offenders as the prison gates clanged behind them and brought them to a haven. He met young girls, children in years, whom vice had taken so early in ravenous clutches, and brought them home to Helen and to Claire—and to a priest who could search the heart of man or woman and read its secret thoughts. They took little children from their mothers' arms or from the streets, and fed and clothed them—and sometimes housed them for days together.

This was the work that Helen and Wilfrid Dacre were doing, and had been doing for five years. They had taken it up at the death of their only child, and the need of them seemed appalling. It was to work like this that they brought the widow of the dead Roderic—the mother of the dead Roderic.

And Claire? Of course she shrank from it. The coarseness and the sin fairly nauseated her at times, but this soon passed away. After a

little she grew absorbed in it, gave it all her energies. The years flew by. Wilfrid Dacre grew paler and more emaciated, but he still lived past the allotted seven years to carry out his daily routine, to do good, and to do it well.

So strange, indeed, are the ways in which men become acquainted, that the meeting of Dr. Edward Nugent and Wilfrid Dacre is hardly worthy of being called strange. It was Monday morning, and, as usual, Wilfrid Dacre stood waiting for those he had promised to meet upon their discharge from the city prison. As he leaned against the wall of the waiting-room, his eyes fastened upon the Island boat, which had just left the other side of the river, he noticed a tall, gray-haired man quite close to him. Dacre had seen this man twice before, so that now the kind old face seemed familiar.

It was indeed a kind face, a good face. The generosity of Edward Nugent's heart had kept that look of youth in his countenance, and, only for the sadness of his features, his age would not have seemed to warrant his gray hairs. Dacre wondered if he were waiting for any one from the Island—an erring relative, perhaps, who might be serving a sentence for some petty crime. He

kept watching him for some time before the impulse came to speak.

“Have you ever been across the river?” he said, suddenly—“through the penitentiary, I mean?”

He spoke abruptly, and Dr. Nugent, finding himself addressed, turned around. His glance sought his interrogator’s face, and what he saw there made his own face quite gentle and sympathetic.

“No,” he said. “I am a comparative stranger to the city. We moved up from a country town to be near my son. He thought I was old enough to stop practising. I think so, too. I don’t care much for the active life any more.”

“How did you find out this portion of the city?” asked Dacre, involuntarily.

“I don’t know. I was drawn to it unconsciously, I think. It has a fascination for me.”

“Strange!” said Wilfrid Dacre. “Your son knows you come here?”

“Yes,” said the old gentleman; “he will be along in a little while. What a melancholy procession that of Monday morning is! The poor flotsam and jetsam of humanity. Would to God we could restore them to faith and innocence! To give them a chance to redeem themselves! Not

one, I wager, out of all who come here, fails to go back again."

"Oh, yes," said Wilfrid Dacre, "there are many. Many to help them too. I wish you could call on us some time, and see what we are doing." He drew his card from his pocket and gave it to him.

"Dacre! Dacre!" said Dr. Nugent, thoughtfully. "I have heard that name. Tell me, do you know a priest named Father James Reynolds?"

"He is the brother of our own Father John Reynolds, who takes charge of the spiritual end of our work," said Dacre.

Dr. Nugent held out his hand.

"Mr. Dacre, will you honor me by shaking hands with me?" he said, in a voice full of feeling. "I have heard all about you. Many a night I lay awake picturing what you might be like, and wondering if—" He broke off. "I knew Father James well—I met him fresh from a visit to his brother, and to your home. Your wife and another lady are connected with you in this work?"

"Yes; come down and look the place over," urged Wilfrid, eagerly. He had taken a sudden

and violent liking to this big man—and Wilfrid Dacre was not given to sudden or violent likings.

“I will, I thank you.” Then he glanced up quickly. “Here is my son.”

A young man was coming with swift steps down the long flight of stairs that led from the street to the landing. Wilfrid Dacre watched him, strangely curious, for he was much attracted by the elder man, and wondered what sort his son would be. He saw a handsome face, the chief expression one of great strength and will power. It was softened somewhat now as he glanced at his father.

“Ready to come on, dad?” he asked, cheerily.

“Yes, immediately. Edward, this gentleman is Wilfrid Dacre.”

“Wilfrid Dacre!” The young man extended his hand impulsively, and the smile that lighted up his face transformed it from grave manhood to boyishness. “Your name is a household word. It is such an odd name—one can not forget it easily—and since Father Reynolds spoke of you—”

“Father Reynolds may have been carried away by his enthusiasm,” said Dacre, with a smile. A sudden warm glow went over him at the sponta-

neous good feeling in the clasp of those strong fingers and the light in that handsome face. "And again, you, being an only child, may share some of your father's—"

"An only child!" laughed the young man. "Not I. There are five brothers and sisters of us. However, I am the only one to follow my father's profession."

"A good profession," said Dacre, warmly. "But I see the boat near shore, and I have my work to do. Will you favor me with a visit some time? My eagerness is not entirely unselfish. There is much need of a physician."

"You will help, Edward—my son is a specialist in his line," said Dr. Nugent. "No, now—not much of your time—an afternoon a week."

"We'll see," said the younger man, more cautiously. "At any rate, we'll call on you."

The rest of the morning was a busy one for Wilfrid Dacre, but in spite of the nearness of the approaching boat he turned to look again at the young man's aristocratic figure as he walked away beside his father, noting his air of distinction, and the pride of his bearing, from the tip of his dark-brown head to the toe of his well-shod foot.

"Great Scott, he looks more like a prince than a physician," said Dacre to himself. "But they are certainly fine people—I never felt so drawn to a living soul as I do to them."

He was telling his wife and Claire about them later in the day, and Claire looked up with interest.

"If it's that young Dr. Nugent of whom the papers are talking—Dr. Edward Nugent, Jr.—why, Wilfrid, you never asked him to give his time to us! He's invented some kind of a tube—I must look it up—and has saved I don't know how many lives in the Children's Hospital."

"That's the very fellow, then, Claire," said Wilfrid. "Talk about providence!"

"Talk about audacity!" said Helen, with a smile.

"My girl, could I be audacious in a better cause?"

It may seem odd to meet, a score of years older, those two friends who were young in the preceding chapter. But you would know both of them: Claire Lestrangle at forty-six is rarely lovely still, not a thread of white in her yellow hair. Time had penciled lines under her sad blue eyes and about the lovely lips, which have lost their ful-

ness as the years sped by. The contour of the face is thinner, too, and the white hands, never very fleshy, show the bones quite plainly. Beyond that she is the Claire Lestrangle we knew, but infinitely happier. Helen, perhaps because of the whiteness of her locks, looks older than her friend. But the good they had done and were doing spoke in the souls that shone out in the peacefulness of their faces. They won all hearts unconsciously. The years had slipped by unnoticed and unfelt, and Claire Lestrangle could scarcely realize that Time was flying so swiftly.

"They are Catholics," said Wilfrid Dacre now, after a short pause.

"That is good—I am glad to hear that," said Helen Dacre. "I don't like to ask favors from others if our own can bestow them. What does he look like—the young Dr. Nugent, I mean, of course?"

"A woman's question—I knew it was coming," laughed Dacre. "I'm afraid I can't describe him. He's old until he laughs, and then he's young—a boy. He's handsome: a sort of refined handsomeness until he sets his jaw; and then he's like—well, then, he's all man."

"Is he dark?" asked Helen.

"I don't know," confessed Dacre. "His hair is dark, I think. But I can't remember."

The subject had been dismissed from their minds almost a week, and Claire Lestrangle had forgotten it, when, one Thursday evening—the only evening in the week that the three took exclusively for their own—they were seated in the room which they called library or den or parlor as the fancy pleased them. In fact, it was Helen's library, Wilfrid's den, and Claire's parlor, and many a laugh they had at the names they gave it. They were prepared for an evening of calm enjoyment. Beyond a rare visit from Joan Lester—the faithful Joan, who was growing very old now—and, once a year, a call from Father Duncan, Claire Lestrangle had no visitors. Her husband's brother never came to see her. That he was living at Lestrangle with his wife and children she knew, but that was all; for Joan was reticent, and would say nothing rather than hurt Claire by unadvised words. Helen and Wilfrid had many relatives and friends, but when one visits not at all, it is a relationship and friendship based on pure esteem that perseveres.

One of Claire's gifts—a gift that had proved very valuable to her in her work with the Dacres

—was music. She had several new things to try now—this time in the “music-room.” At a table near-by sat Wilfrid Dacre in his “den,” busily pasting pictures in a large book—a work, by the way, in which he took much delight, and which was to him a diversion. Helen, with a book in her hand, was not prepared to do much reading, rather to laugh at her husband and listen to her friend.

It was, therefore, with unmixed pleasure that they read the names of Dr. Nugent, Sr., and Dr. Nugent, Jr., on the cards brought to them by the maid, and when, an instant later, the two men entered, both Claire and Helen felt that they would not be disappointed in them. The elder man, tall and noble-looking, with the rugged features and slight air of melancholy. The younger, “more like a prince than ever,” thought Wilfrid Dacre, seemed different in his attitude, now that women were present. His air of homage, his attention, were pleasant to observe. Claire Lestrangle could not take her eyes from him, puzzled to account for his attraction for her. More than once their eyes met. Each was observing the other, openly at times, and covertly when he or she thought the other’s attention

occupied by something or some one else. Old Dr. Nugent succumbed immediately on entering. He would give Wilfrid Dacre three of his afternoons a week, on condition that he was placed in a position where he might visit jails and prisons easily. And here his son broke in with a low laugh:

“Can’t you suggest some manner in which my father can take up his permanent residence in some penitentiary? I’ve suggested several ways of breaking the law, but he only shakes his head at me. See that air of reproach, now—you’d think I was a little shaver yet.”

“That’s all you’ll ever be to me, my son,” said Dr. Nugent.

“I don’t object, dad; but mother won’t like any such additions to her family. She relates many incidents of father’s generosity while we lived in Abneyville—he couldn’t see a stray dog or cat or youngster that he didn’t bring home. But something always happened to them.” He looked at his father with a twinkle in his eye.

“Yes; I’ll relate some of my experiences to you later on, Mr. Dacre,” said Dr. Nugent, smiling a little, “especially my last and worst venture—the adoption of one Anthony—”

His statement was interrupted by the entrance of the maid.

"Two gentlemen to see Mrs. Lestrangle," she said.

Claire took the pasteboards, and read the names.

"Send them here," she said to the maid. Then she turned to Helen Dacre. "I had rather not see them alone," she began, in a voice from which all light and joyousness had fled—a voice that made young Dr. Nugent glance at her sharply. "They are Frederic Lestrangle—and his son—his son—Roderic."

Her tones faltered over the last word. Helen came to her side, an expression of sympathy on her face. Dr. Nugent, seeing that for some reason both women were agitated, became entirely engrossed in Wilfrid Dacre's conversation, and the younger man bent his eyes to the book of views lying on the table. But he was keenly alive to Claire's emotion—he seemed to feel an answering response to it stirring in his own bosom.

"Roderic! He called his son Roderic! I did not know that, Claire."

"Nor I. Joan would not tell me, I suppose,

fearing that she might hurt me. Here they are now."

Just as of old she stood, calm and proud, her fair face lifted, the light shining on her hair. Frederic Lestrangle hesitated as he entered the room, and saw her, in appearance scarcely a day older, her eyes meeting his as inscrutably as they had twenty-one years before.

"Pardon this intrusion," he said, in the courteous accents she remembered well, as clear and musical as ever; "but my son has heard so much of his busy Aunt Claire that he at last prevailed upon me to bring him here. Claire, my boy Roderic."

Involuntarily, Claire took a step forward. In spite of herself her form trembled, her hand went to her heart, and a mist swam before her eyes. For it seemed to her that she was looking at her own dead boy, living and in the flesh, with twenty years of manhood added to his childish frame and bearing.

Frederic Lestrangle watched her with a peculiar light in his eyes.

"You are welcome—Roderic," she said, and her voice was quivering—"welcome a hundred times." She held out both her hands, and the

young man clasped them heartily in his own, looking at her almost affectionately.

“My Aunt Claire!” he said, “how often Joan has told me of you! Poor old Joan! She will not last much longer, she says, but bids me give you her love and duty. You will always be ‘Miss Claire,’ the lady of Lestrangle, to her.”

He smiled boyishly, and she, feeling the warmth of those young hands, could not take her eyes from his face, so fair it was! The close waves of yellow hair clustering to the well-shaped head; the eyes blue, smiling, unshadowed—the eyes of a guileless soul; the face splendidly handsome.

“How like!” she said to Frederic Lestrangle, with the first impulse of kindness she had ever experienced toward him. “Don’t you see how like he is to my Roderic?”

“Joan swears that he is Roderic in the flesh,” laughed Frederic Lestrangle.

And then, remembering herself, Claire introduced father and son to the Nugents—and to the Dacres, who were merely acquainted with Frederick, and had never seen his son. A curious oppression had weighed upon young Dr. Nugent as he watched the meeting between Claire Lestrangle and her nephew, and when it came his

turn to be introduced to Roderic he raised his eyes with a distinct sense of antagonism—a feeling utterly foreign to his nature. But their eyes met.

Some souls there are honest and true enough to recognize the honesty and truth of others. Some natures there are that feel the call of a kindred spirit and are frank enough to respond thereto. The eyes of Edward Nugent and Roderic Lestrangle met squarely. They held each other's glance, and they held each other's hands. Neither was conscious then that they had formed a bond of friendship which was never to be broken this side of the grave. That as the soul of Jonathan was knit unto that of David, so were their souls bound, never to escape. Neither knew this then—but afterward, when they realized the greatness of their affection, they knew it began at that portentous moment.

CHAPTER VII.

"HE HAD A GRANDSON, ANTHONY!"

LIKE one in a dream, Claire went through her duty as hostess that evening. It seemed to her that some event of great importance to herself was about to happen. She had good control, fortunately, of her impulses—the years had taught her that; but she was still a woman who had known love and sorrow, and the presence of those so closely connected with both had power to move her. She listened intently to every word uttered by young Edward Nugent and Roderic Le-strange. She knew they were even then on terms that were almost intimate—and she could not account for the strangeness of feeling which urged her to try to separate them. She looked at the young doctor, as she had been looking at him since his arrival—he was, as Wilfrid Dacre had described him, truly princely-looking. She wondered if he had inherited that splendid bearing from his mother. The elder man, while plainly a gentleman, was rugged of feature and careless

of demeanor—the ruggedness and carelessness that women love; but his son was so different, thought Claire Lestrangle.

And Roderic!

She could scarcely bear to look at him, nor could she bear to keep her eyes away. Again and again she glanced in his direction—why, it seemed cruel that another should be so like her son. This resemblance was not confined to her own thoughts alone. Wilfrid Dacre remarked it to Roderic's father.

"I never saw two people more like each other than your son and Claire," he said, smiling.

"It is peculiar, isn't it?" answered Frederic Lestrangle. "His mother is a pronounced brunette."

"Is that so? He is your only child?"

"My only son. There are two others—much younger. They take after their mother—fortunately."

"Fortunately?" asked Wilfrid Dacre. "I would scarcely say that, if I were you. He is a very handsome boy."

"Handsome—doubtless. I could add, as good as he looks, only it might sound odd from a father's lips."

"No one could doubt that, looking at him," said Wilfrid Dacre, heartily.

Dr. Nugent joined in then.

"Our lads seem to be striking up an acquaintanceship."

"So I see. I have read of Dr. Nugent's late achievement. The papers have been giving him great praise."

"Yes," said the father; "I am much gratified, of course—but more gratified to see that he bears his honors so lightly. I think success is apt to turn a young fellow's head. You'd scarcely believe it, but he is only twenty-five."

"He looks much older," said Frederic Le-strange.

"Until he smiles—then he is all boy," put in Wilfrid Dacre.

"There is something about him that reminds me of Claire when he smiles," said Frederic Le-strange, suddenly. "There, just then—a resemblance."

"Merely a passing one," said Dr. Nugent, carelessly. And then he looked at his watch. "I must be off, or my good wife will talk to me for keeping her son out so late!" He laughed hugely at the joke. "Come, your mother's waiting."

"Yes," said Edward Nugent. He turned to say a few parting words to his new-found friend. Dr. Nugent held Claire Lestrangle's hand very gently. He had been much impressed by the beauty and goodness of her face.

"I should like Felicia—my wife—to meet you, Mrs. Lestrangle. My little daughter, Jessie, is coming home from her studies in France next month—we sent her to finish her music there. Will you permit me to bring her and her mother to call on you?"

"With the greatest pleasure—I should be delighted," said Claire, with the smile that was so like his boy's lighting up her face. "Any Thursday. But we shall see you before she—your daughter—comes home."

"Oh, yes; indeed you will."

"Claire, when are you coming out to occupy Silas Wasdale's hut, as Joan calls it?" said Frederic Lestrangle, with a genial smile.

"Poor Joan! She never called my pretty villa anything else!" Claire hesitated. "I am glad to have the opportunity of thanking you personally for the kindness you showed to the children we sent there last summer," she said in reply.

"Nonsense, Claire. It was Roderic's doings. He's a born philanthropist, and when it was his Aunt Claire's work—well, you see, Joan has his head packed full of nonsense about you."

"Silas Wasdale's hut came in just then to help me get rid of superfluous time and money," said young Roderic, his blue eyes alight with enthusiasm. "I'm interested in anything like that, Aunt Claire. Let me help you, won't you?"

"Ask Mr. Dacre for work—I am only serving under him."

Young Roderic's pitying eyes traveled to Wilfrid Dacre's pale face, and there was much meaning in that ingenuous glance—meaning that Wilfrid Dacre understood.

"My dear boy," he said, frankly, "if you were to ask either of these two gentlemen of medicine how long I had to live, he would tell you a month or two, or even three. If he examined me, he might give me a year, with care. But I left the States, when this work of mine had been under way five years, to ask a miracle—that God would spare my life until some one came to take my place. I've lived twenty-one years since then."

"And you'll live a hundred," said Helen, impulsively, "before any one can take your place."

"Nonsense, my dear. Perhaps another Lestrangle will come." He smiled at Roderic—a smile that could mean much or little.

"No, no," said Frederic Lestrangle, roughly; "my son has other work to do in this world than running after unfortunates. The work is all right; but for him it would be all wrong."

"Nothing is all wrong if one has a taste for it."

Neither of the Nugents had said a word. But at the beginning of the conversation they had exchanged quick glances. Now, with a curious expression on his face, the elder man spoke.

"Don't let me lead the conversation away from its present channel," he said; "but didn't you mention a rather peculiar name a few moments since? Silas something?"

"Oh, Silas Wasdale! Yes," said Claire; "that was the name of an old man who owned a ramshackle little place on the edge of the Lestrangle woods. He left there one day, and I had the hut torn down and a villa erected. We send some poor children out there every year. Joan, the old housekeeper of Lestrangle, never called my villa anything but Silas Wasdale's hut."

"Silas Wasdale! That's the name. He had a grandson, Anthony?"

"Yes; a little boy—a smart little chap. Did you know him?"

"About a score of years ago. He came to Abneyville while I was there. I was merely acquainted with him."

"And the grandchild?"

"Oh, the grandchild—the grandchild is still on terra firma. But I must not detain you. Good-night, everybody, and come on, Edward."

He included all in his pleasant bow and departed, followed by his son. Claire thought that Frederic Lestrangle looked annoyed when he left them, but his parting grasp was hearty. She went to her own room that night in a confusion of mind that had not assailed her for a long, long time.

* * * * *

Frederic Lestrangle was indeed annoyed. No one knew better than he the quixotic turn of mind of his son Roderic. He called the young man's ideas quixotic, and absurd, and untenable, and from the first both father and mother had done all they could to discourage him. But it seemed as if this attitude was inborn, and, in spite of his father's ridicule and his mother's sarcasm, he persisted in his assertion that he

owed a duty to those in the world less fortunate than himself. He was deeply interested in his aunt's lifework, and always spoke of it with longing. Although they came to the city every winter from Lestrangle, Frederic staved off this visit to Claire as long as he possibly could, and then insisted on accompanying his son, much as he disliked meeting his brother's widow after such a lapse of years. He counted on his presence to offset any direct influence she might have upon the boy.

He was prepared for the young fellow's enthusiastic encomiums of his aunt when they left the house, and there was a singular smile upon his face. Roderic, ingenuous, frank, simple as a child, did not inherit the tendencies of his father nor the nature of his mother. His was a character foreign to either of them. He might, indeed, have been Claire Lestrangle's son.

And here Frederic Lestrangle paused and frowned, and his jaw set savagely; for his boy had asked him a question:

"Father, do you believe what Mr. Dacre said about being left alive until some one comes to take his place?"

"Do you feel a consuming anxiety to sign his

death warrant?" asked Frederic Lestrangle, with bitter sarcasm.

"Don't, father," said the young man, much hurt; "you know I did not mean that. But he said that perhaps another Lestrangle might take up the work."

"I shall not," said Frederic Lestrangle, coldly; "and you shall not—at least during my lifetime. You can please yourself when I am dead."

Young Roderic was silent. He thought of the perfect good feeling existing between the two Nugents, their unity of interests, their sympathy in each other's pursuits, and he sighed. He resolved not to annoy his father any longer with either comments or questioning. So no further word was exchanged between them. As they reached their own house, the butler stopped Frederic Lestrangle.

"There is some one to see you, sir. He has been here all evening. Says he is an old friend of yours, or I should not have permitted him to wait."

"Where is he?" asked Frederic Lestrangle. He was in a bad humor—not inclined to welcome either old friends or new.

"In the smoking-room, sir."

"Why the deuce did you put him there?" growled the elder man.

"I could watch him easiest there, sir," was the rebuking answer. It seemed to reprimand Frederic Lestrangle for his choice of old friends.

"Good-night, father; I'll go right to my room. I'll be up if you want to have a chat."

"Good-night, boy," he replied, surlily, saying the word over his shoulder as he walked along the hall. When he entered the smoking-room, he did not see the man who had been waiting for him so long, so thick was the apartment with the smoke of his best Havanas. Justly indignant, Frederic Lestrangle moved across the floor quickly, looking down then at the occupant of his own easy-chair, who just turned his head to glance up at him, lazily.

"How do you do?" he asked. "Glad to see you."

"Who—what— Good God!"

Frederic Lestrangle staggered back, his face paling.

"You!" he muttered. "You!"

He felt for a chair, dragged it toward him, and sank into it then, resting his head on his hands. The visitor did not speak, but continued to puff

at his cigar, gazing at the tip of it between the puffs in a reflective manner.

"Buck up!" he said, then. "Don't let the unexpected pleasure of my company make you feel so bad."

Frederic Lestrangle did not answer him. He raised his head slowly, looked about him as if in a daze, then, rising to his feet, went to the buffet at the side of the room. He picked up the decanter. It was empty—and the glass on the table told who had consumed its contents. An exclamation broke from Frederic Lestrangle.

"Did you drink all that stuff?" he asked.

"Every bit of it—and ready for more," was the cool reply. "A mere drop, my boy."

"I'm afraid you've had all you'll get here," was Lestrangle's answer. He rang the bell sharply, and, when the butler entered, pointed to the empty decanter without a word. The man took it away, refilled it, and brought it back. And during that time Frederic Lestrangle did not speak to his visitor, nor his visitor to him. He stood waiting—and held his glass that William might fill it. William glanced expectantly at the stranger, but Frederic Lestrangle shook his head. The man withdrew much mystified.

"As unsociable as ever," said the visitor.
"You have the nerve to drink alone?"

"I drink only with my equals."

"Your superiors are saved much embarrassment."

Frederic Lestrangle came toward him then, and sat in the chair opposite.

"I thought you had gone to Australia—didn't you want that \$30,000 to buy a sheep farm?"

"Yes. It bought me lots of things—but no sheep farm. I had a fine time—it put me on my feet a year or two," airily; "but now it's gone. I'm down."

"That means you want another few dollars?"

"A mind reader!" retorted he, with admiration.

Frederic Lestrangle smiled in a sour fashion.

"You think so? Then you can read that I do not intend to give it to you."

"No; I can't see it that way. You'll give it to me."

There was much confidence in his tone. Frederic Lestrangle had been preparing for this event a good many years—had grown old expecting it. Now that it came, it found him least ready. He had no command of himself this evening, but no

one would imagine that from his manner, which was calm and easy and inscrutable.

"What will compel me to give it to you?" he asked now, looking the man steadily in the eye.

"You have a wife, a son, daughters—you are a Lestrangle."

"I know all that. I am a Lestrangle—and who are you?"

"A poor devil of a fellow, who has been your instrument on a good many occasions, but is now your master."

"You amuse me!" Frederick Lestrangle snapped his fingers. "That is how much I care for you—and I fear you not at all."

"Mrs. Claire Lestrangle is somewhere in the city. Would she like to see the man who passed as the lover she rejected for money's sake, when you wished to turn her husband's mind against her? She might be happy to make my acquaintance?"

"She might, at that. She is an honest sort of a woman. She'd ask you how much you made by the transaction."

There was a steely glitter in the handsome blue eyes.

"I would tell her it only netted me a few

thousands—not enough, by any means, for so delicate an undertaking. But I could relate how Frederick Lestrangle and I stole her son from his bed one night, dug up the body of another child, and, putting on it Roderick's clothing, placed it in a lake in the Lestrangle grounds."

In spite of himself Frederick Lestrangle turned pale. But he stretched his limbs with an assumption of unconcern.

"Tell her that, too. Wasdale, I will not give you another penny. If I thought it would do any good, I might. But to give you money now would simply mean that you'd fasten on me like a leech and that you'd hang on until I was drained dry, or defied you. I won't do it, Wasdale. You're an escaped convict—there's a sentence of ten years hanging over your head even now. If you tell this tale, I'll give you the lie and prosecute you for blackmail. You daren't tell the real fate of Roderick Lestrangle."

There was defiance in his voice, and in spite of apparent braggadocio the other knew that he meant every word he said. Frederick Lestrangle had the upper hand of the situation. He had paid him for his dirty work, and his power over him was nothing. So he gazed at the floor re-

flectively. Lestrangle was bluffing it, and so was he. But Lestrangle meant his bluff: it was, rather, no bluff at all, but the real thing, and he knew what chance he would stand in a court of law against this cool and polished gentleman, of irreproachable morals—he, an escaped convict, with a sentence still to serve. If the police had the slightest hint of his presence in the city, he would have no chance to tell his story—rather, he would be railroaded to Sing Sing prison at once.

"Look here," he began, frankly. "I'll acknowledge that you could get the best of me at that. But what do you know about the boy? Nothing?"

"I know that you slipped him quietly out of the window as you crossed the Hudson River," was the cold-blooded reply.

"That's what I told *you*. But I didn't do it."

"No?" Frederick Lestrangle felt the hair rising on his head with fear. "He is—alive?"

"Give me what ready money you have, and I'll tell you the whole story."

Frederick Lestrangle rose and left the room, returning in about three minutes with a roll of bills. He threw it on the table.

"You'll find over nine hundred dollars there," he said. "It's for information you're about to give me. After that, I never want to see your face again."

The man picked up the bills and put them into his pocket.

"Old Silas Wasdale lived at Lestrangle, taking care of my son, Anthony—whose father, myself, he reported had been lost at sea. Instead of that I was in prison, as you know. When my term was up, I was supposed to return to my father, give out that I had miraculously escaped drowning, and try to live a respectable life. I brought young Roderick to him, and sent him as far away from the place as he could get, taking my own child here to the city and putting him in an institution. Silas Wasdale reached Abneyville, where Roderick Lestrangle, known as my son, Anthony Wasdale, took sick of the fever, and died. So, you see, I did not kill him—at least I am innocent of that."

His companion's head had sunk forward on his chest. Wasdale could not see his face. He waited for an answer, but none came. Nemesis was upon Frederick Lestrangle, and in what shape only he knew.

"I'm going now," said the other. "You've no objection to my taking a drink?"

No answer.

"Well, I'll have one, anyhow." He picked up the bottle and put it to his head, and the fiery liquor coursed down his throat. Beyond this all-consuming thirst for liquor, there was little of the law-breaker about the man. Save for a somewhat shifty look around the eyes, he was to all appearances a respectable, middle-aged fellow, with some traces of refinement about him still. His speech especially was quite good. He placed the bottle back upon the buffet, and stood looking at Frederic Lestrangle's downcast face, not understanding his sudden quietness.

"Well, I'm going," he said. "It's about the last you'll ever see of me. Will you shake hands good-by?"

Mechanically Lestrangle extended his hand. Much surprised, the other grasped and shook it heartily. Then he left the room, and the watchful William saw him safely to the street. He had barely reached the corner when he heard his name called violently. He looked back. Frederic Lestrangle stood on the steps, waving his hand at him, and, again struck with aston-

ishment, Wasdale retraced his steps. Frederic Lestrangle was breathless, as if he had been running.

"Come back—to-morrow—night. I may want you. I'll have more—"

He said nothing else, but went inside and closed the door behind him, leaving the thoroughly mystified Wasdale to walk slowly along the street, pondering on this sudden change in the attitude of the man he had come to bully, and who had routed him so completely. Lestrangle went back to the smoking-room, and sat down in the self-same chair; for, as Wasdale had spoken, he had heard, ringing in his ears, the conversation between Claire and Dr. Nugent that evening:

"'Silas Wasdale! He had a grandson, Anthony?'"

"'Yes; a little boy—a smart little chap. Did you know him?'"

"'About a score of years ago. He came to Abneyville while I was there. I was merely acquainted with him.'"

"'And the grandchild?'"

"'Oh, the grandchild—the grandchild is still on terra firma.'"

Those were the words—the words that rang

like clarion notes through his brain, supplemented by that phrase of his visitor's:

"Silas Wasdale reached Abneyville, where Roderic Lestrangle took sick of the fever, and died."

Frederic Lestrangle felt, with all the fear of a guilty conscience, that Dr. Nugent's words were true, and that his nephew, whom he had thought so securely out of the way, was actually alive. In that moment of realization his courage failed him; he felt that he could not plan further action alone, and he could not bear to lose sight of his partner in previous crime. Why he wanted him to return he scarcely knew—he could easily say that he wished to give him more money. In reality he felt that he must have some possible source of help in the danger that threatened.

Many years had passed over Frederic Lestrangle's head since the day he had pitted his conscience against his ambition. Ambition won—won with the aid of a beautiful face, won with the aid of his love for a woman. The woman was his—had been his a score of years, was his to-day. He looked back. The unrest of youth had fled with its strength. He was calmer now, and the prize he had secured still dear to him,

still beautiful in his eyes, but not worth the cost. "Honor was in the blood," said faithful Joan of the Lestranges, and the honor in this Lestrangle's blood was a source of galling discontent. But he had taken the first step. All he asked from life, life had given him: Wealth, honor, love, children both clever and handsome. These were his. And for these he would carry out his evil projects to the end. "When God's good time comes," he had said, "let it find us together."

Was this God's good time?

Not these were the words that tormented him that night. He had little thought of God. He slept, troubled, weary, disturbed. Over and over the sentence was repeated in his brain:

"He had a grandson, Anthony!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE NUGENT AND OTHERS.

MRS. NUGENT smiled and shook her head when her husband and her son reached home after visiting the Dacres. She listened to their enthusiastic descriptions of their work, and of the people themselves.

"My dear Neddy," she said to the elder man, "do you intend to die in harness?"

"Felicia," he answered, gravely, "is not that the best way to die?"

"You promised—"

"I know I did. But this is a purely selfish work."

"Purely selfish?" She looked at him with a merry twinkle in her eye. "Purely selfish, Neddy?"

"Yes. I am trying to save Edward from being forced to give up too much of his time to it. You know, Felicia, that Edward's time is more valuable than mine—in a pecuniary sense, I mean," patting her hand gently. "So I am doing this to save money."

There was a laugh from the son's lips, in which the mother joined, although the tears came to her eyes. Being a woman, she liked to chide her husband occasionally, but she loved him with all her heart. To her this splendid husband of hers was dearer than any sweetheart ever had been. Oftentimes his reckless charity had deprived her of some anticipated pleasure, but she gave up everything and anything cheerfully for his sake, and with the hope, too, of sharing in the blessings that God gives to those who try to befriend their fellow-men. If Dr. Nugent made sacrifices, his wife made as many.

The love and confidence they had for and in each other beamed out of their peaceful faces. Often Edward Nugent looked at them somewhat enviously, asking himself if he could expect to know such true happiness as theirs had been.

The Nugent household was a happy one. The two elder brothers were in business in the city: they were both married, and had homes of their own. This fact, and the fact that Edward Nugent's field would be a larger one here, had induced the father and mother to leave Abneyville. They wanted to be near their children, they said. Both daughters—Jessie and Regine—had shown

talent for music and art, and the parents sent them to Europe to a relative of the mother's "to finish." It was Jessie who was expected home in a few weeks, and her coming was eagerly anticipated.

"It will appear more homelike to have our daughter in the house," said Dr. Nugent, more than once. "I enjoy seeing a girl's face about. Our sons are splendid, and we love them; but the tenderness of a home centers in its daughters."

"If only Regine were coming too," said Mrs. Nugent with a sigh; for, as usual, from the Dacres' affairs they had drifted to their own. "Aunt Sara says she will need the next six months—"

"Aunt Sara is evidently prejudiced in the young man's favor," said Edward, slyly.

"Oh, I won't listen to you!" exclaimed the mother. "My Regine or my Jessie married to a long-haired, dreamy-eyed artist, who will starve her to death!"

"You forget that she's an artist herself; and they can make enough to live on between them."

"Don't talk like that, Edward. Surely the men my daughters marry will be able to support them."

"Mother dear, we've sent Regine away for the past four years to make the most of herself. Is it American-like for her to bury her talents and forget all she has learned because she marries?"

"Edward, I think you are a Woman's Rights man."

"Mother, I believe that women should exercise the gifts God gives them. There's Jessie, now. You know how finely she played before Aunt Sara told you to have her finished out there—though to my mind she could have finished just as well here. We've got as good in America as any foreign land can boast of."

"Now, Edward—"

"I won't quarrel. That's my private opinion, dear, and you're welcome to yours. Think of Jessie playing just occasionally to entertain her friends or her husband, or amuse herself! Why, that would be a clear refusal to make the best of what is in her. It would be a sin."

He spoke warmly.

"Those women I saw to-night," he said. "Mrs. Dacre and Mrs. Lestrangle! Father, weren't you impressed by them?"

"Very much so."

“Especially that Mrs. Lestrangle. What a wonderful face she has! Mother, you will love her—such nobility, such sweetness, and such melancholy! I should like to hear her story. She must surely have a story worth listening to.”

“I know some of it,” said Dr. Nugent. “She lost her husband very suddenly when her child was two years old, and when her boy was five he was drowned. Some misunderstanding had deprived her of her husband’s confidence, which meant that the greater portion of his wealth went to the man you met there—Mr. Frederic Lestrangle. She did not mind that—she has little use for money.”

“Oh, I should not say that,” said Edward. He rose with a grave look on his young face—the look that made him appear so much older than his years. “You know I’m a bit practical, father and mother—more practical than either of you. But there’s a change coming—I feel it. To-night something happened to me—there in that room with Mrs. Lestrangle and Roderic. I felt drawn to those two. The woman’s eyes asked me a question, and young Roderic’s seemed to answer it.” He smiled then. “Isn’t that a queer speech to hear from your prosaic son? I am going to bed.”

He bent to kiss his mother as was his wont. Her eyes followed the handsome figure as it left the room: then she looked at her husband.

"Don't you think that it is well he is a little bit more practical than the older Edward?" she asked.

"Yes, dear. I think his wife will have more bonnets."

"More bonnets! Pshaw! I don't mean that, Neddy."

"You mean he won't fill his wife's home with cats and dogs and other people's children."

"Perhaps I mean that." And she laughed at him.

* * * * *

Jessie Nugent came home as expected. She was her mother's own self in face and figure, as well as sunny nature. Her sweet disposition had been wholly unspoiled by her sojourn on the Continent, and one forgot that she was not pretty, in the happiness that seemed to radiate from her. She had improved very much during her four years' absence—had learned much that she would not have learned had she remained under the shelter of her father's roof. Whatever may have been harmful in her experience had been neutral-

ized by devotion to her art. When, after supper, on the night of her arrival, they heard their daughter—whom they had always considered a genius—play, they were satisfied and delighted. She seemed a new being then; the sweet face dreamy and thoughtful; the eyes veiled; every thought engrossed in her beloved instrument. Edward Nugent's eyes were shining as he bade his sister good-night, and he looked at her strangely.

"Father," he said, the next day, "let us take Jessie and mother to see Mrs. Lestrangle."

The father laughed.

"I'm glad Mrs. Lestrangle is so much older than you, my son, or I should have to dread losing you."

"Oh, it isn't anything like that, father."

"I know—I know. I'm only joking."

He felt rather than saw the change that had come to his son since meeting Claire. They spent much of their spare time with her—and young Roderic, with an earnestness that precluded all doubt of his sincerity, came to Wilfrid Dacre, volunteering his services.

"Father doesn't like it," he said, in his boyish manner; "and mother scoffs at it. But I'm

irresistibly drawn to the thing. Somehow I can't help it."

"Is your mother a religious woman?" asked Wilfrid Dacre, curious to find out why the son was so different from his surroundings.

"No," said Roderic, frankly. "Mother's good and lovely; but she's in the world, you know, and you can't expect people like her to be religious—or anything like that. Aunt Claire, now—I love my mother dearly, Mr. Dacre, very, very dearly. But you won't think me ungrateful or unfilial if I say that I wish she resembled Aunt Claire."

"There is nothing disloyal in the wish—your aunt is a wonderful woman," said Wilfrid Dacre. "What church do you attend?"

"The Catholic, of course."

"Your mother—"

"No, mother's not. Neither are the girls. But father said he wasn't going to have any head of the Lestrangle family belong to another faith. So I was a nominal Catholic until two or three years ago, when I found out a few things for myself, and began to practise it. There's a difference."

"As night and day," said Dacre, briefly. "Do

you know you look so much like Claire that you might be her son?"

"So mother says—she doesn't like it. But I can't help my looks, now, can I?"

Dacre thought he seemed pleased, rather than otherwise. He did not know, nor did any one except the young fellow himself know, how unhappy his home was—especially since the meeting with Claire. Frederic Lestrangle seemed possessed of some fiend of discontent, and Roderic's silence—resolved on that night when he saw how his aims annoyed his father—seemed to drive him to distraction. Even the wife, who had always been able to bend her son to her will, found that a more powerful influence was at work. Distressed and angry at this knowledge, she immediately attributed it to Claire Lestrangle. So the mention of her name was a signal of unpleasantness in that divided household, and Roderic the target at which all was aimed—covert sneers and open complaints.

But he maintained a reserve that was simply maddening to Frederic Lestrangle, for it reminded him of Claire—Claire, who had been wont to look at him with those calm blue eyes and pass him by; Claire, whose head had been

wont to poise itself at just such an angle as she turned from him in a silence that no word of his could break.

So it was with his son Roderic. He felt, in the torture of those weeks, that he was growing to hate him. Surrounded by this unsympathetic atmosphere, the boy withdrew into himself, seeking more and more outside of it the comfort that he craved. In those days he took a pure delight in Claire Lestrangle's presence, and she, in turn, loved him for the boyish frankness that seemed so essentially a part of him. He found in Edward Nugent a friend as true as steel, and, when he saw and heard what these people were doing with their lives, he looked upon his own empty days and sighed. He had no profession—it was not likely that his father ever would permit him to adopt one. He became a regular visitor to the Nugent household. Here he heard the “cases” of the elder doctor discussed—vastly interesting, because they were connected with the Dacres and with Claire. He heard Edward Nugent tell of his latest experiments—of what he hoped to accomplish still. He heard Jessie Nugent relate the trials of her continental life, heard her play, heard her plan what she would do with

her talents for God and for herself. He heard of Regine Nugent, the young art student, whom one of the great French painters absolutely refused to allow to return home because of her talent. All this Roderic Lestrangle listened to with growing discontent in his soul. Here was no society small talk, no platitudes, no frittering away of time, no scattering of interests. Here were earnestness and reality. He longed for some staff upon which to lean—some single purpose to fill out his days.

Jessie Nugent, simple of life as of heart, was a new sort of woman to this young fellow. With no pretensions of any sort, no aspirations to shine to the envy of those less fortunate than herself, with a well-cultivated mind, and fingers almost magical in the command they had of the keys they touched, she dawned upon the young man as a revelation. He was an idealist by nature, exalting those whom he cared for far above him. His temperament was, in fact, too dreamy, too poetic, for the hard things of life he longed to encounter and overcome. The years were to teach him much.

He was unconscious of the affection that grew up in his heart for Jessie Nugent. In three

weeks' time she had reached a peculiar position. He was slowly but surely giving her the first love of his boyish heart, and those who have known what this first love means will realize how much depends upon its object. Jessie saw in him a well-favored lad, with a pleasant manner and a charm of speech. She had seen many of that sort, she and Regine, in their life together with Aunt Sara at Mme. Duclerc's *pension*. She had been used to admiration always, and to respect: these had been accorded her first in her own home, and therefore she went through life expecting both. She received both.

Roderic appealed to her because of his youth. His love was out of the question: she would have laughed it aside had there been even a hint of such a thing. But there was none, and she went on her way, planning her life and her duties for the future.

She had spoken a great deal since her return of the young French artist studying under the master who was teaching Regine. She praised him discreetly—brought in his name whenever she could, and at last Edward began to notice how often this was done. He had become even graver and more taciturn since Jessie's home-

coming, and often his eyes would follow her and Roderic with a question in them.

“Paul Delmar!” he said, one evening, when Jessie had just finished telling an amusing incident that had occurred to her and Regine in Paris. “Did you eat or work a single hour without Paul Delmar?”

There was a strange note in his voice. Jessie laughed out loud.

“Paul, like the poor, we had always with us.”

“Oh, did you! And when, pray, is he coming to take you away from us?”

The question startled the father and mother. Roderic’s smile faded, and his blue eyes sought the girl’s face half-fearfully. She blushed.

“Not at all, I am afraid.”

“Afraid?”

“He *may* come—to visit father and mother.”

“And no one else?”

Jessie looked at him roguishly.

“He will have his Regine with him.”

It seemed as if a weight was lifted from the shoulders of every one in the room. Only the mother had words ready.

“Regine! My Regine to marry a Frenchman!”

“Oh, his mother’s name was Kelly,” said Jessie, with a laugh. “He isn’t too French. You’ll really like him—every one does. And he’s desperately in love with Regine.”

The secret was out at last. She had promised to break it lightly—had promised her sister to do all she could to bring them to look upon Paul Delmar with favor.

“That is all right,” said Dr. Nugent, placidly. “I expect men to be in love with my daughters—that is but natural. Your mother, my dear, had a score of lovers before I dawned on her dazzled vision.”

There was another laugh at that.

“Surely Regine doesn’t care for him?” said Mrs. Nugent, a bit anxiously.

“Surely Regine does,” said Jessie. “There, it’s out, mother—I promised to do it. He wanted to write ever so long ago, but she wouldn’t have it. I had to come home and explain. In March, when Regine leaves, he will leave with her, present his credentials, and ask your consent to their engagement. Regine will make no promise without your knowledge of it all.”

“I am deeply gratified at Regine’s sense of justice,” said Dr. Nugent. “And the young

man, I dare say, will please even the critical Mrs. Nugent."

"I hope so," said Jessie; "for they're very much in love."

"I don't see the necessity of waiting a year, then," said the father.

"Cable them an immediate order to get married," said Mrs. Nugent, with some sarcasm.

"Don't," laughed Jessie. "Paul hasn't a cent."

"Worse and worse," declared the mother. "Well, I'm glad we know. I thought it was you, Jessie."

"No, mother," she answered, lifting her honest eyes to her mother's face. "I am not so lucky."

With which enigmatical expression, she changed the conversation. Later, after Roderic Lestrangle had gone, Edward Nugent put his hand on her shoulder.

"To-night," he said, "you remarked that you were not lucky in not having Paul Delmar's love. The remark annoys me. Did you mean it?"

She smiled up at him, but even with the smile he was surprised to see the tears that came to her eyes.

"I meant it—not Paul Delmar's love—I don't

want that. But it is lucky, I think, to have the love of a man as good as Paul Delmar. That is what I meant by that remark."

"Jessie, are you sure—you've been away four years, you know—you must have met many people—are you sure you don't want a word for yourself, as well as Regine? Is there no Paul Delmar for you?"

She looked away a moment. A frown came between her brows. Then once again she brought her glance to his.

"Yes, Neddy," she said; "there is a Paul Delmar for me—some one a hundred per cent. better than Paul Delmar—to me."

His expression changed.

"You met him since you left us?"

"Not once. I met him long before I went to France. And now I won't answer another question." He saw she meant it by the resoluteness of her face. "Good-night, little boy."

"Good-night, little girl."

They smiled—it was their parting words since babyhood—and it brought back tender memories to both.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

JESSIE had always been Edward's favorite—and in her eyes the king could do no wrong. He would not like to think that any man could come in and carry her away from them. It had annoyed him to see Roderic Lestrangle's eyes fastened upon her in such an absorbed fashion—annoyed him even though he felt that he knew Jessie too well to think that she could look with favor even on such a splendid fellow as Roderic.

He was learning to appreciate Roderic more and more every day, but he was not yet prepared to admit that Jessie could care for him.

But now a new question arose: Who was it that Jessie cared for?

Many things had kept him awake at night—study, examinations, the pursuance of a favorite line of thought. But nothing had come home to him with such entire force as this: Who was it Jessie cared for? Who was it that had claimed

her affection so long ago, held it during the years, and still retained it?

He went to bed with the question unsolved, and lay awake pondering on it. In the dark his eyes were wide open, staring out of the window. He thought of all the past in those long hours that elapsed between the time he went to bed and midnight. Sleep refused to come, although he wooed it in every way imaginable. He was restless—yes, and, though he could scarcely bring himself to acknowledge it, unhappy.

He had been lying there so long that at length he resolved that he might as well read to pass the time away as to spend it in the manner he was doing. He was just ready to put this resolution into effect when he imagined that he heard a slight stirring of the vines outside his window. The sound struck already sharpened nerves. He lay quiet, listening.

It came the second time. It seemed like the stealthy movement of a human body. And then Edward Nugent smiled. Who would come at that hour and in this way to his home? But again it came, and again. The young man slipped his hand under the pillow, grasping the revolver he carried with him when he was called

out at night. He knew now that he was not mistaken.

In a few minutes he saw a man's shadow heavy against the pane. He never locked his window at night, and he heard the grunt of satisfaction with which the fellow discovered it open. Cautiously he poked his head into the room. Nugent lay with closed eyes, scarcely breathing. He felt that a ray of light swept his face. Then just as cautiously the intruder lowered himself to the floor. Edward Nugent watched him, and his eyes caught the glint of something shining in the man's left hand.

But still he did not move.

The burglar went to the door, tried it, found it, too, unlocked. Then he moved softly about the room. Near Edward, on a table at his side, was his watch and a roll of bills. The young man had time to notice the irresolution of his midnight visitor.

"Why not try it?" he heard him mutter. "I might be able— No, I won't. I'll settle things now for good."

He spoke savagely. Edward Nugent very quietly brought his revolver on a level with the man's head.

"Drop your knife," he said then, coolly, "or I'll blow your brains out. Wait—don't go to that window. Another step, and I'll kill you where you stand."

"You couldn't do me a greater favor," was the strange reply. "Shoot away, young man."

Edward Nugent started violently.

"Who are you?" he asked, in a whisper. "Who are you? Light the gas, and let me look at you, for I swear I know your voice!"

The strange intensity of his whispering tones made the other tremble with excitement.

"Light the gas!" cried Edward Nugent then. "Strike a match—anything—let me see you! Oh, Anthony, Anthony, Anthony!"

The name was a sob of reproach, of joy, of love, of tenderness. Throwing aside his weapon, Edward Nugent leaped from his bed, struck another match—for the first had fallen from the intruder's shaking fingers—and lit the gas. The glare of light could not disguise the expression on those two faces.

"Anthony! Anthony, my brother!" said Edward, holding out his arms. "My dear brother!"

Shame, doubt, wonder, joy, passed in quick succession over the face opposite him.

"Neddy!" he said. "You don't mean it—it's a dream—it's a dream that I'll awake from as I have from all others. O Neddy, it isn't you—it isn't—and with a welcome for me after all."

"Why, what have you done?" simply. "Let the world say what it will, my brother Anthony but made a mistake, and that is all. So you've come home to us, at last!"

The other could not believe in the reality of this reception. He stood staring at him—and then, turning, sank heavily into a chair.

"I'm afraid," he said, after a moment— "I'm afraid. It can't be true."

"But it is true," persisted Edward. "Can't you feel the truth of it?" He stooped and took his hands and wrung them warmly. "Is that real? Feel me." He bent so that the other could look into his eyes. "Look at me. I'm Neddy."

"How do you come here? My mother—"

Safe and well, thank God, and father too. Only worried and anxious, and praying every moment of their lives for their son Anthony."

"Good God!" groaned the other.

"Father has left no stone unturned to find you. There is not a prison nor a hospital he has

not searched over and over. We came to New York to be with Tom and Bob—that's what we told every one, and tried to believe ourselves. But it was because we wanted to find Anthony."

The man dropped his head on his hands.

"Father is waiting—mother is waiting! I have been waiting! And so you've come home!"

"I haven't," he said, between his shut teeth—"I haven't come home. I've been in jail four years—finishing my term. Am I not a credit to the Nugents? I can find nothing to do—no one to give me a helping hand—and I came here. Why, do you think? Not because I knew whose house it was—that I had no inkling of—but to sit down to a square meal, my last square meal, and let the people find my body in the morning. I was desperate—driven mad by lack of food, by hunger and privation. I had deserted God, and God had deserted me."

Edward Nugent realized then what depths of despair there may be in the human soul. His heart ached over this poor fellow, who faced him now with such longing in his eyes. His countenance still bore the traces of prison pallor, but it was a handsome face withal—a fair and handsome face. Not a bad face, by any means—

rather that of a man who has been controlled by circumstances.

"Talk things over with me," said Edward then. "Will you, before you go any further, tell me just what has happened this past five years?"

"I can't. I have no desire to do better—no wish. I want to drift with the tide—and it's low tide, Neddy, it's low tide, I tell you. If I could get a motive—"

There was the sound of steps along the hall. Edward Nugent sprang to his feet, listening. Then he motioned toward the big wardrobe that stood at one side of the room, and the other, understanding, sprang to it. In a second, almost, there was a tap at the door.

"Are you awake, Neddy?" called his father's voice.

"Yes," said the young man, promptly. "Come in, father."

"I thought I heard voices," said Dr. Nugent, looking about the room. "What's the matter—can't you sleep?"

"No," said Edward, quietly. "I've been lying awake since I went to bed."

"So have I—perhaps that is why I was so positive I heard voices in here—I couldn't under-

stand it. Guess I'll sit down and talk to you. If you can't sleep, either, why, we'll keep each other company."

Edward smiled.

"That means you want to smoke too—and what will mother say? Supposing she came in on us—what do you think would happen?"

Dr. Nugent shrugged his shoulders.

"She'd put the two of us out for doing anything so outrageous," he said. "We'd better not try it, eh? The smoke might wake her up."

"Sit down—we'll talk instead."

"Yes."

The old man seated himself in the very chair that the prodigal had filled a moment since.

"How are you getting on with the Dacres?" was Edward's first question. "Do you get into enough prisons through their influence?"

"Plenty of them, plenty—and sad sights I see there. Heavens, what wrecks those men are—and women too, poor souls! It breaks my heart to look at them."

"And why do you go, father? Haven't you done enough?"

"Perhaps I've done a little—one can never do enough."

"Don't talk like that. You've done your share."

"If I have done my share," said the older man, impressively, "where is Anthony? Why can't I find him? Is he living in degradation, or filling an unknown grave, disgraced and dishonored? Edward, the thought of him at times is maddening— If he could but feel, but know how I long for him, he would come—even if it were from another world."

Edward Nugent had never seen him so moved.

"I do not speak of this to your mother," he said, after a little. "I dare say she, too, keeps such thoughts to herself, rather than annoy me. But to-night it seems as if I must speak. You, my dear son, will understand."

Edward Nugent's eyes were misty.

"Indeed I do understand, my father," he answered, brokenly. "He can be sure of nothing but forgiveness and tenderness from his own."

"Nothing but forgiveness and tenderness from his own," repeated Dr. Nugent. "What else, my son? After all, what was it he did? A boyish escapade—easily lived down—"

"That's it," said Edward Nugent—"lived down. Do you know what I think, my dear

father? I think Anthony has gone away somewhere, and, remembering your goodness and kindness, is trying to redeem himself, to live an honest life, before he asks you to take him back again as of old. This *must* be the reason why you can not find him. You expect to meet him in the ranks of the unfortunate still, but I think you will not come across him there." His eyes began to kindle. "No, father. He is an honest man, or trying to be one. Perhaps in a year's time he will come forward of his own free will, and ask you to take him back again to his place in your heart."

His voice, full of earnest manliness, rang through the room. Dr. Nugent stared at him wistfully—there seemed something prophetic in the words.

"I hope you are right," he said, finally.

"And I, my dear father, know that I am right. My convictions seem positive proof to me. We shall hear from Anthony yet—"

"Well," said the older man, rising, "I sha'n't keep you longer from your bed. But it would make no difference to me—"

"Ah, yes it would," said Edward Nugent, gently. "If you met your son, Anthony, now, this moment—and you understood that he was

trying to make reparation, that it would help him if you waited his time to welcome him and not yours, you'd wait, father, you'd wait."

"I can not tell," said Dr. Nugent, absently. "The joy of seeing him, perhaps—" His eyes sought a curious object lying on the table. "What is that, Neddy?"

With a swift movement the younger man tried to hide the object from his father's view. But Dr. Nugent was too quick for him. He reached forward, and picked up the bull's eye lantern and the murderous-looking knife. He stared at them—and then at Edward's face. He reeled backward then.

"Not that, my God—not that!" he breathed, and Edward Nugent knew that he understood. "Not that—not to take your life, Neddy, my boy—he did not come—"

"Father, on my honor as a man, on every hope I have in life and afterward," said Edward Nugent, "it was not that. Rather desperation—a fit of despondency—"

"He is here?"

"In this room—here, within ten feet of you. But will you not wait *his* time? Let him redeem himself. Father, he craves that chance to redeem

himself ere he feels your arms about him. Let him show you how he loves and honors you and is willing to atone."

"Yes," said Dr. Nugent. His fine face was grief-stricken. "To-night I will make the greatest sacrifice of my life, for my boy's sake. I will not ask to say one word to him—I will not ask to hold his hand, if he will but step out where I may see him. Only one look, that I may keep it with me until his time comes."

There was breathless silence. Dr. Nugent turned toward the door, and as he did so the wardrobe door swung open and a man stepped from it into the room. He folded his arms across his chest, and raised his face to the light, concealing nothing. The fair hair clustered about his temples, damp with perspiration. Great sobs burst from his throat. The tears were streaming down his face, unchecked, unheeded. He held his face to the light that his father might look upon him.

Dr. Nugent went to the door. Hungrily his eyes devoured the features that he loved. This child had learned his prayers at his father's knee. This child had been treasured as were his other children. But he had been the unfortunate one.

and all the strength of this man's strong nature went out to him in his weakness. He was strong now—not weak—his boy Anthony. His lips twitched. Only two strong men could have done what these two men were doing now—hungry for the sound of each other's voices, longing for the touch of each other's arms, yet simply looking at each other and trusting to the future. No one could look at such a sight unmoved. Slowly Dr. Nugent unclosed the door, slowly he drew his gaze away from that pathetic face, and went outside. They listened to his footsteps. How they dragged! How every fiber of his nature clung to that room, and to that erect form, to that unfortunate child of his!

Edward Nugent came forward and took Anthony's arm. His own eyes were filled with tears.

“And yet you say you can do nothing?” he asked. “You want a motive? Anthony, haven't you a motive now?”

For answer the young fellow stumbled toward the bed, where he threw himself in an agony of passion. Edward waited until the first paroxysm of grief wore away and he was calmer.

“Now we'll have something to eat, and talk over our plans,” he said. “I've been doing a lot

of thinking since you came in, Anthony. Let us put our heads together. But not until I get you food. I'll go to the pantry and see what I can find. Bolt the door behind me, and don't let any one in until I come back."

They sat far into the night talking, these two, and when Anthony rose to his feet at last, it seemed to him that he had been born again. There was a look of resolution and courage on his face.

"We're about the one height," said Edward. "Jump into my bathtub, and I'll lay you out a suit of clothes. You've made up your mind now, and I want you to start inside as well as out. Then I'll go with you to the nearest hotel, and stay there with you until to-morrow."

"Neddy," said Anthony Nugent, as he went to bed for a few hours' sleep that morning, "it doesn't seem possible I'll be able to pay you back now. But I'll do it."

"Pay me back!" said Edward Nugent, with a curious smile. "Give my father one moment's happiness, and I will devote my life to you."

"How much better a son you are to him than I have been!" said the other.

"I should be," was the answer; "but let us

not talk of that. We have lots of time to talk over our merits and demerits in the future—which, please God, we shall spend together.”

“Which, please God, we shall spend together,” echoed Anthony Nugent.

“When your time comes,” smiled Edward.

“Not mine, but God’s.”

CHAPTER X.

RODERIC AND HIS FATHER.

By much circumvention Frederic Lestrangle had avoided telling Anthony Wasdale the real reason why he had asked him to return after such a curt and high-handed dismissal. He had given him a sum of money the next day, and told him to hold himself in readiness to do some further work for him. Nothing pleased Wasdale better than this prospect, for he knew that, while Lestrangle needed him, his supply of money would not fail. Frederic Lestrangle might have many faults, but he was a good payer. So, in obedience to his commands, Wasdale kept himself well concealed, and only an occasional note or two showed that he was ready at any moment for what work Lestrangle might ask of him.

Meanwhile, there was much for Frederic Lestrangle to do. He had to discover what had happened to old Simon Wasdale's grandson. In order to find this out he went to Abneyville in person.

Every one in Abneyville knew and loved the Nugents, and almost on his arrival there Frederic Lestrangle secured the information he sought.

Dr. Nugent had had three sons—and another son by adoption. Was there one by the name of Anthony? He had a son Anthony, yes—it was this son who had gotten into wild company, and run off with a traveling show when he was about eighteen. He had never been like the other Nugent boys—always a little wild and peculiar, but good-hearted and handsome.

That was all Frederic Lestrangle desired to know—where Anthony Nugent might be. Later, they told him, rumors had come that he had gone from bad to worse, and some said he was in jail for a term of years. When this rumor spread, the old doctor had never seemed content. He was always anxious to get away from Abneyville. Until at last the family did go.

After that, Lestrangle, for politeness' sake, was forced to listen to a disquisition on the new doctor, and how far he fell short of Dr. Nugent's perfections. He listened with patience, for his thoughts were busy. He was glad he had retained Wasdale. Wasdale had many friends among the unfortunates who made a living by

preying on society, and he busily outlined a plot. Wasdale must begin a search for Anthony Nugent—and at once. He must find him.

Once found, what then?

Lestrangle had been a respectable man, even in thought, a good many years. He had not shrunk from removing Claire's child from his path when Claire's child stood in the way of his achieving his ambitions. Now, in a cold-blooded manner, he asked himself if he could risk murder a second time.

"I am a murderer, virtually, now," he told himself. "To win all the things that I possess to-day, I did not fear to commit a crime. Why should I fear to carry out the plans which I projected then? Through the carelessness of my tool they miscarried, and now this man must do what he agreed to do. He must do that for which I paid him.

"But why through murder? Is that necessary? There are many ways to drive a man to the irrevocable step. Wasdale must study his weaknesses; must live with him; must give him every chance to ruin himself. He shall ruin himself—if it ruins me."

The cruelty of the man was apparent in the

venom of the last thought. He hated Claire—he hated her child. And he loved the things which unlimited wealth had brought him. He did not know regret—he had gotten all he desired—and in God's good time, he thought, derisively, let God repay!

God would—but Frederic Lestrangle did not think of that. He was still to learn that God's ways are not ours.

He shook the dust of Abneyville from his feet that very night, and sent for Anthony Wasdale on his arrival home. He had not long to wait. At nine o'clock William admitted his master's unpleasant acquaintance to the smoking-room.

"Are you ready for me now?" was the first question on Wasdale's lips, and Frederic Lestrangle looked at him as contemptuously as ever.

"Yes, I'm ready," he said—"quite ready. You're to finish the work I paid you thirty thousand dollars for twenty-one years ago."

The other looked at him, startled. The coldness, the masterful manner of this man, had always awed him, held him under control.

"What are you talking about?"

"I thought you were honorable—at least to those that paid you," said Frederic Lestrangle.

“You believe that my nephew died of fever while under your father’s care?”

“He wrote me that.”

“He lied. He sold the child to a physician, who brought him up as his own. And he is alive.”

“Alive?” echoed Wasdale, in a curious voice.

“Yes; he’s alive. I knew that the last time I saw you. Very much alive, as far as I am aware. But I do want to find out how you intend keeping your part of the bargain. I treated you pretty fair, if you can remember. I put you on your feet, and gave you enough to keep you comfortably all your life.”

“What can I do now?” asked the other. “My father’s dead—and all his people. There’s no one alive belonging to me—my youngest son, maybe. He’s probably a respectable farmer somewhere out West—the institution sends them away when they come of age—”

“Or following the profession of his parent down East, if there’s the same drop in him,” said Lestrangle, sarcastically.

“I hope not,” said the other, mildly enough.

“His mother was a good woman.”

Frederic Lestrangle laughed.

"That does not gives me back my thirty thousand dollars."

There was silence for fully five minutes. Then Wasdale leaned forward.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Find that fellow, and get him out of the way," snapped Lestrangle.

"Kill him?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Teach him to drink himself to death—ruin him, body and soul." His lip curled. "It will be odd to have Claire Lestrangle's son keep me company in the nether world."

Wasdale did not hear the last sentence—he was deep in thought—a frown on his forehead.

"How am I to know who took him or what his name is?"

"His name? He is Anthony Nugent, son of Dr. Edward Nugent, late of Abneyville, now of New York. He has been in prison, is probably there now. It is said that Dr. Nugent came to the city to search for his son. He has not found him yet—it depends now on you whether or not he will ever find him."

"Anthony Nugent!" mused Wasdale. "Never

heard of him. If he's one of the boys, I ought to know him. Well, Lestrangle," he said, easily enough, and with an assumption of equality that made Frederic Lestrangle frown, "I'll come back as soon as I've got news. I'll get what I can out of the rest of the crowd—but it takes a little cash."

"As usual," said Frederic Lestrangle. "Bear one thing in mind, Wasdale. I'm in no humor to throw away any more than I have. I gave you thirty thousand dollars for nothing. I dare say you'd be willing to take thirty thousand dollars more for the same thing. But I'm not doing anything so rash. I'll give you fifty now—not another cent. And nothing more, unless you tell me something worth while. I'm not a good thing, remember."

"I'll remember," said Wasdale, briefly. "If it's a week before you hear from me, don't be surprised. I'll be working."

Lestrangle nodded carelessly. The other got up and left him, and Lestrangle lighted a cigar, and sat with it between his lips, alternately chewing and puffing. His thoughts were decidedly unpleasant, and he was in no mood to be interrupted, even by his son. It was his son who came

in, with a half-smile on his lips and a strange light in his handsome blue eyes.

"Father," he said, "I've come to ask you to do me a favor."

Frederic Lestrangle looked at him, sourly enough.

"A favor?"

"Yes." He bent over the back of a big chair, with a confident expression on his face. "We've been a bit chilly, this last few weeks, but I wish we could forget all about it, father—it's nothing."

"Well, what do you want, Roderic?" asked the father, in a softened tone.

"I want you to come to Aunt Claire's with me to-night."

"I will not go."

"Not to meet Aunt Claire, but the Nugents—Mrs. Nugent and Miss Jessie."

"I—will—not—go!" said Frederic Lestrangle, in a thundering voice. And then a sudden thought struck him. He sat back, and chewed the end of his cigar once more. At last he said, more quietly: "Why do you ask me anything so preposterous?"

"I do not know—I thought you might enjoy

meeting them again—and the young lady plays so beautifully.” Roderic’s voice showed the restraint he put upon himself to hide his disappointment.

“Will the rest of the family be there—the old doctor and the young one?”

“I believe they will—old Dr. Nugent, anyhow.”

Frederic Lestrangle was silent, his brows drawn together. At last he looked up into Roderic’s cold face.

“Very well—I’ll go. When are you expected?”

“At about eight—they are not fashionable folk.”

Try as he would, the young man could not keep the sneer from his tones. He had been wounded by that rebuff, and his sensitive nature did not recover quickly. His father’s consent seemed grudgingly given, and for the moment he felt that he was coming against his will.

“Do not visit these people to please me,” he said. “I only thought of giving you pleasure—it will spoil what pleasure I might have if I feel that you are doing this contrary to your own wishes or inclination.”

Frederic Lestrangle laughed.

“Do not fret, my son. I have changed my mind, that’s all—almost as effectually as these people have changed your disposition. How old is the young lady, may I ask?”

His tone conveyed his thoughts quite plainly. Roderic flushed.

“I have never asked her age,” he said. “Her age does not interest me.”

And he left the room.

* * * * *

Frederic Lestrangle was a man of quick perceptions, and he noticed at once that Mrs. Nugent and her daughter were constrained in his presence. Jessie, always prepared to welcome people for what they appeared to be, did not like this courtly, white-haired gentleman, with the cold eyes and the thin, repressed mouth. Nor was she prepared, ever, to affect a liking that she did not feel. Her mother, too, was repelled by his stiff manner, and Roderic, noting the difference, was in misery.

Dr. Nugent, however, was too broad-minded to pay much attention to intuition, and soon he and Frederic Lestrangle, seated in a corner by themselves, were engrossed in conversation, while the

young people sat with the Dacres and with Claire. When Jessie played, all conversation ceased. Dr. Nugent was exceedingly proud of his daughter's talents, as he well might be, and he noted, with keen satisfaction, the somewhat astonished expression on Lestrangle's handsome face as he listened.

"Quite extraordinary!" he said. "She has wonderful technique."

"I do not think so much of her technique as of the feeling she can put into her music."

"Yes," said Lestrangle, absently. "She is quite young, isn't she?"

"Twenty-three."

"She looks younger than that."

"None of my children look old—Edward, perhaps on account of hard study. But he does not look old now."

"No; he is quite boyish at times. You have other children?"

"Several. Regine is studying art in Paris. We expect her home next year."

"Any boys?"

"Tom and Bob, the two eldest. Both in the banking business."

"Indeed—didn't I hear something about a

son named Anthony?" Between the half closed lids the eyes were sharp and glittering.

"Yes," said Dr. Nugent. An expression of sadness clouded his fine face a moment. "Yes," he continued, "I have a son Anthony."

"Is he in the banking business too? Oh, pardon me! My questions may seem impertinent, but I am really interested. Your son Edward and Miss Jessie seem so talented. I should like to meet the other members of the family."

"Thank you. I can understand your interest. I have not seen my son since about a month ago."

Frederic Lestrangle dared not press the question further. Try as he would, think as he would, he could imagine no other way in which to bring up the subject again. So he listened with what grace he could command to the talk and gay chatter of the young people at the piano.

"Going away!" he heard Claire Lestrangle say, in her sweet voice. "Is not this a very sudden resolution, Dr. Nugent?"

"Oh, no," was the young man's smiling answer. "I have been thinking about it almost a month. I want to strike out on new lines, and, now that the chance offers, I feel that I ought to take it."

On the way home Frederic Lestrangle spoke to his son Roderic.

“Where is young Nugent going?” he asked.

“To one of the Western cities—San Francisco, I believe.”

“What can be his reason?”

“Family reasons, I think. Intimate as I am with him, I have never asked him for them. And no one seems to understand why he is going except his father.”

“You’ve met all the Nugents, haven’t you, Roderic?”

“Yes, sir; all except the youngest daughter, who is in Paris.”

“What is Anthony Nugent like?”

“Anthony Nugent? Anthony? There’s a Tom and Bob—but Anthony—”

“Yes, Anthony. Dr. Nugent told me he saw him a month ago.”

“I have never met him, father, nor heard his name mentioned.”

“Queer! I suppose he’s the black sheep of the family, and they don’t care to mention him. But still you see such a friend—”

Roderic Lestrangle looked puzzled.

“I am very intimate,” he said—“almost like

one of themselves. Are you sure there's an Anthony, father?"

"Dr. Nugent told me so himself."

"Perhaps he's not in the city, then—he can't be. His mother has never uttered his name—nor Miss Jessie."

"Supposing you try to find out something about him for me," said Frederic Lestrangle, in a musing tone.

"Oh, father, I wouldn't bring up anything like that. If they wanted to discuss him before me, they would probably have done so of their own accord. What do you think of Miss Jessie's playing?"

"Very fine—very fine, indeed."

"I thought you would like it. I wish you knew her—she is a very sweet girl."

"Oh, I suppose so. You'll meet many sweet girls before you die or marry one of them—any amount of them willing to be ultrasaccharine for the sake of your father's money."

"Don't," said Roderic, in a low tone. "Haven't you any illusions left, father?"

"None, my son."

"Didn't you love mother? Surely money—"
And Frederic Lestrangle laughed—he threw

his head back and laughed—in such a way as to make Roderic stare at him dubiously. He did not like that laugh.

“Your mother, my boy? Why, I idolized her. I would have committed any crime to win her. And she loved me. But I had to have money. She would not take me ungilded.”

“Father, that isn’t true.”

“So true that, if your Aunt Claire’s young son had not drowned himself at such a fortunate time, *you* would probably never have been in existence. My son, do not put faith in a woman’s promises unless you have the money to back you. A woman will love you dearly, if you can pay her bills.”

“That sounds like treason from my mother’s husband.”

“It is wisdom from your father’s experience.”

“And knowing that, you have been happy?”

“Very happy—very happy. I am willing to pay the price.”

Roderic said no more. The words hurt him, and the vein of thought they indicated outraged every sentiment of his poetic nature. He knew that a great love existed between his father and mother—this knowledge often made him ideally

happy. He had never heard such sentiments as these from his father's lips, and he was surprised to feel how keenly they seemed to pierce his heart.

Was that the way with Jessie Nugent too?

CHAPTER XI.

AND GOD DISPOSES.

“EDWARD,” said Jessie, in a low tone, “I would like to speak to you alone to-night before you go to bed. Will you try to arrange it?”

Edward Nugent looked at her curiously.

“Why, Jessie?”

“Must I explain my reasons for wanting to speak to you alone?” somewhat stiffly.

“No,” he hesitated a moment—“no, Jessie. You want to ask me why I am going to San Francisco—you want to know what motive compels me. Jessie, I can’t tell you. So I won’t see you alone to-night, for you might induce me to break my resolution. Only know that it is not for my own sake.”

Her lip curled.

“It is for Anthony’s, then.”

He started, giving her a strange glance. Their father loved her dearly, that he knew. Could it be possible that he—

“Have I no intuitions of my own?” she asked

then. "What would drive you so far away from home but a quixotic notion?" Her eyes flashed. "I do not know where Anthony is, or what he is doing. He may be in prison, he may be free as air—but if he can not redeem himself here—*here*, in this very city which has seen his degradation—oh, Edward, I have not been blind! Do you think you could keep my father's sorrow, my mother's melancholy, a secret from me? If Anthony does not redeem himself here, he will do so nowhere else. Only cowards run away."

The scorn in her voice was genuine. Edward Nugent turned his head.

"It won't be necessary to see you alone, now," she went on, pitilessly. "I don't know what scheme you and father have concocted between you; but that it has to do with Anthony I know—"

"You love Anthony, Jessie—you have always loved him. He is your Paul Delmar—"

Jessie laughed.

"No, he is not. I love Anthony with true sisterly affection—I love him dearly—better, perhaps, than any of my brothers, because women are apt to add pity to their love when the object is unfortunate. Only remember that sometimes

a woman's intuition is keener, truer, than the reasoning of men. Don't go away with Anthony. Keep him here, if he is here."

Edward Nugent leaned forward, and gripped her arm with tense fingers. A peculiar expression was on his face, and his eyes were glowing in the darkness.

"Jessie, I demand to know the name of the man you love."

She looked at him, her sweet face transformed by the pride, the haughtiness, that seemed to freeze every feature of it.

"You have no right to make such a demand, and I shall not answer you."

"Jessie—"

"That will do, Edward. I do not care to hear any more."

"I did not mean—"

"You are treating me like a child—like the child you knew before I went away. I refuse to be treated in that manner. I can only repeat what I said to you. Let Anthony work out his salvation here. It will be his only safeguard for the future."

She left him then, running lightly up the stairs before him. He stood looking after her, until

his father called him. He called his name a second time before Edward heard.

Jessie meanwhile went to her room. She closed the door very quietly. The tears were streaming down her face, her bosom heaving.

"O poor Anthony, poor Anthony!" she murmured, brokenly.

She took off her hat and threw it upon the bed.

"And to go so far away—I could not stand it—I could not. The length of the continent! Who knows what might happen? Who knows? No, he must do his duty here."

* * * * *

Wasdale lost no time in trying to discover the whereabouts of Anthony Nugent. But the young man was a newcomer in the ranks in which Wasdale sought him; and even when he succeeded in identifying him with "Tony the Dude," as he was called, no one could tell where he had gone or what had become of him.

He reported this to Frederic Lestrangle, and received one line of instruction:

"Follow Edward Nugent."

This he did for many days, but at first he did not catch him during his brief visits to his brother. More than that, Wasdale did not expect

to find the discreditable one in a fashionable hotel. At last, discovering no other trace of him, he dogged young Dr. Nugent's footsteps to the Metropolis. Patience was rewarded then, for here he came across the man he wanted.

Once more he wrote to Frederic Lestrangle. The man was found—what was he to do with him? Preparations were in order for his departure, and there seemed no way in which Wasdale could reach him. It was all very well for Frederic Lestrangle to tell him to “make a way.” That was impossible under the circumstances.

But Frederic Lestrangle was not without fertility of ideas. Briefly he outlined a plan, and saw that it was put into execution.

Anthony Nugent, seated reading in his own room, was surprised that morning to receive a call from a tall and stately gentleman, wearing heavy glasses and a thick beard slightly streaked with gray. The man was refined and well bred of manner, and Anthony was prepossessed, if anything, in his favor, before he opened his lips.

“Dr. Nugent sent me to you,” said the stranger, in a pleasant way. “He has been called to a case many miles from here—a case

that will probably keep him a fortnight. I am a colleague of his—Dr. Stewart, at your service.”

Anthony bowed. Behind the thick glasses the eyes studied him sharply. Anthony’s face, now that the dread of what the future might have in store for him was removed, was a handsome one: the mouth a trifle weak, the nose prominent, the eyes full and large. What the visitor saw in this countenance must have satisfied him, for he smiled. There was a covert satisfaction in that smile.

“His case takes him to a country place—a house of good standing and people who will do much to further his interests. He has been called in consultation with a number of other physicians whose reputations are world-wide. He asked me—I am a resident there—to call here for you, and to bring you back with me.”

“He wants me?” asked Anthony, incredulously. “Why?”

“That I can not tell—he did not give me his reasons.”

The visitor pulled out his watch.

“I must catch my train in thirty minutes—Dr. Nugent started on an earlier one,” he pursued. “If you care to accompany me, I shall be

delighted. If not, I will convey any message you may have for him."

"Message? Oh, no," said Anthony, bewildered. "He said nothing about this to me yesterday."

"I left last night—only saw him a little while ago myself. I dare say he did not know it. Er—will you get ready—or shall I start?" He spoke in an offhanded, careless manner.

"No," said Anthony; "he must have a reason for wanting me, of course—certainly I will go. Thirty minutes, you said? That is short notice, but I can get ready."

He was much confused. From the stranger's whole appearance Anthony was convinced of the truth of what he said, and there was no time to speculate on what sudden notion had taken Edward. Anthony was prepared to do anything Edward told him to do, but ponder as he might, he could not understand why Edward wished him to leave the city.

"Unless it is that he feels that he can not trust me," he said, not without some sadness at the thought. "Well, I've deserved it—I know I've deserved it. He's been more to me, and done more for me, than any one else ever could

or would do. I'll try to show him that I'm grateful."

While these thoughts ran through his mind, he packed what things he might find necessary in a small grip. In less than ten minutes he signified to the stranger, who had withdrawn to the window to wait for him, that he was ready. Together they left the room.

Anthony Nugent stepped to the desk, gave the clerk his key, and also paid his bill.

"I have been called out of town suddenly," he said. "I may or may not return. I won't be back for two weeks, anyhow."

A carriage was waiting at the door, and into this Dr. Stewart motioned Nugent to enter. They were driven rapidly in the direction of the station. As the cab rolled around the corner of the avenue, Anthony gave a violent start and leaned forward, straining his eyes after the figure of a man going up the street.

"Strange!" he said. "Imagination, I suppose. I could have sworn that that was my brother Edward."

"A resemblance, I daresay," said the stranger, carelessly.

"A strong resemblance," answered Anthony,

with some emotion. He could not explain the queer feelings that swept over him. He was filled with a sort of regret, bordering on melancholy, at what he considered Edward's lack of trust in him.

At the station a man stepped up to Dr. Stewart and saluted him.

"My man," explained Dr. Stewart, with a wave of his hand. "Give him your grip; he might as well take care of that while he's about it. Everything all right, Clif?"

"All right, sir," responded the man. Anthony was too much occupied with his thoughts to notice the quick glance of understanding that passed between them. He made an attempt to buy his own ticket, but Dr. Stewart smiled deprecatingly.

"Your brother, sir, has seen to all that," he said.

They were seated in the parlor car, and Stewart seemed suddenly transformed into a new man. Up to this he had been a bit taciturn and distant. Now he expanded into a genial mood and opened an interesting conversation. Anthony, listening with scant attention at first, and answering briefly, was drawn into it at last, and the next few hours passed very quickly.

They had stopped at a wayside station, where they were delayed some minutes on account of an express train which had been scheduled for a quarter of an hour before. As their own cars moved out with increasing speed, Anthony Nugent bent forward.

"By Jove!" he said. "I never asked you where I am going. What is the name of the place?"

There was evident hesitation in his companion's manner. He looked at him and stroked his beard.

"The name of the place to which we are going is—Lestrange," he answered, very slowly.

"Lestrange? Lestrange?" Anthony looked puzzled. "I've never heard of it."

"No; few people know it. It's an out-of-the-way town: not large—only about six hundred inhabitants—and the Lestranges own the most of it. You never heard of the Lestranges?"

"Never. Is that where Edward is?"

"Yes; at their house. A fine family—the best in their part of the country."

"What is the case? A child?"

"Yes," said the other, grimly; "a child is mixed up in it."

Anthony looked at him inquiringly.

"Mixed up in it?"

"That's only a way we have of talking about cases," said Stewart, genially enough. "You'll probably be sick of the whole thing before they release Dr. Nugent. You see he is a surgeon of great repute in spite of—"

That was all Anthony Nugent heard. A fearful crashing sound broke upon their ears, the cars swayed and trembled, there was a hiss, a snort, a roar, and then the screaming of terrified women, the shouting of terrified men, rent the air. Nugent's lips unclosed:

"What is it?" he said. "What has happened? Who—"

He saw his companion start to his feet, and in the confusion of the moment Anthony made a grab at him. He beat him back with his hands, and the brown beard came away, showing a cleanly shaven face. Anthony held on to him with a grip of iron. Once more came the crashing of wood, and a grinding, jarring, sickening movement. Something heavy seemed to descend upon his head, and Anthony knew no more.

* * * * *

When Edward Nugent entered the Hotel Metropolis, and turned, after saluting the clerk, to

the elevator, he was astonished when the man called him.

“Your brother left, sir, about twenty minutes ago. He gave up his key, and said he had been suddenly called away—that he might or might not return.”

Edward Nugent looked at him with surprised inquiry on his face.

“What are you saying—my brother left?”

“Yes, sir—in company with another gentleman.”

“Did he pay his bill?”

“Yes, sir. Everything is satisfactory.”

“I can’t understand—did he leave no word of any kind for me?”

“He said nothing but what I have told you.”

Nugent looked dubious.

“Would you mind coming to his room with me? He did not intend to leave the city until next week—we were going together. This must be a strange freak on his part, and I can not understand it. Surely he left a note or message of some kind—he was aware I would not know what to make of it!”

The young man frowned as he spoke, and bit his lip. But the anxiety of his tones was so

patent that the man came around from behind the desk and selected a key.

"We'll go on upstairs, sir," he said, "if you wish it. But he said nothing to me—nothing at all. He looked rather pale, I thought, and the gentleman with him—"

"A gentleman with him?"

"Yes, sir. A tall gentleman with a brown beard. A cab was waiting, and they drove off at once."

"What does it mean?" thought Edward Nugent. "Surely not a return to the old life and the old ways after his promises of reform! I can not understand."

A search of the room revealed that the departure had been a hurried one. Some clothes were piled up on the bed, and a big sheet of paper pinned on top of them, bearing in Anthony's scrawling hand the words "To be forwarded."

"Send these things to my house," said Edward Nugent, with a heavy heart, as he saw that Anthony had indeed left without a word to indicate his destination. The grave look that made the young man so much older in appearance than his years warranted settled on his fine face. He felt ten years older, in truth, as he walked slowly

toward the elevator. He could find no explanation of his brother's conduct, save one—and that one the worst. Some partner in crime had called upon him for help, and he had not been able to resist the temptation.

Edward Nugent never forgot that day. He went about his duties with that same gloomy aspect. When it came time to return home, he delayed until he knew that further dallying meant anxiety for his people. His footsteps fairly dragged; he could scarcely force his limbs to perform their office.

"That you, Edward?" called his father's voice from the parlor, as he let himself into the house.

"Yes, dad," he answered, doing his best to speak cheerfully.

"A telegram for you, my boy. Came about two hours ago, but I didn't know where you were. It's there on the hat rack."

With a great hope stirring in his breast Edward Nugent picked up the yellow envelope and broke the seal. The next instant the room seemed to reel around him.

"Come at once. Anthony Nugent dangerously hurt."

* * * * *

"Come at once. Anthony Nugent dangerously hurt."

Edward repeated the words mechanically. He could not grasp their meaning. He stood staring at them, scarcely realizing what they meant, trying his best to understand—trying in vain for a few moments. Old Dr. Nugent, hearing no further sound from the hall, came out of the parlor, newspaper in hand.

"I've been reading of a pretty bad railroad accident out near Portland—that's somewhere near the Lestranges—why, Neddy, what's the matter?"

"I don't know," said Edward. The telegram was crushed in his hand. The other hand was pressed against his forehead.

"Neddy, you've had some bad news? What is it?" asked the father.

"Let me think," said Edward in a hoarse tone.

He could not do that clearly. He asked himself, as he walked into the parlor, his father following him, what he ought to do in this dire emergency. Keep the news to himself until he ascertained the full truth of it, or tell his father now? He would never forgive him if Anthony were to die.

That last thought determined him. He put his hand on his father's shoulder, and held him tightly.

"Dad," he said, "it *is* bad news—very bad news. Try to bear it—try to keep your wits about you until—"

"Anthony?" said the father, in a low voice.

"Anthony—yes."

"He has gone back again—to—"

"Dad, I don't know. I went to the hotel this morning. He had disappeared without leaving a trace behind him, no word, nothing. I could not understand it then. Here is the telegram—I understand it less now."

The father read the few words, dawning horror on his face.

"But, Edward, how—"

"I can not tell you. We parted the best of friends, he and I—excellent friends. How this has happened, father—"

The words refused to come.

"We must go to him," said the older man when he could command his voice.

"At once. Mother will think we are called somewhere together unless she sees—"

“She will not see—she never reads accident reports. Neddy, let us start at once—I must see my boy.”

All the pent-up longing of his heart spoke in those few words. Sorrowfully they made a few preparations and started on their journey.

CHAPTER XII.

POOR ANTHONY!

RODERIC LESTRANGE had been spending the afternoon with his Aunt Claire, and it had been a particularly delightful time for him. In Claire's presence all the petty annoyances of life seemed to take wings. While with her he could not remember that his father and mother totally disapproved of all his doings. Claire opened a new world to him—a world made doubly possible of entrance because of his means. His father gave him a liberal allowance. The pleasures that usually attract young men of wealth in the world had little fascination for a lad of so ideal a nature, so that he had much left for the work he loved.

The news of the frightful railroad accident was being cried on the streets when he reached home. He bought a paper because he had caught the name Portland, and knew that it was near Lestrangæ. Among other items he read one that sent him white-faced to his own room:

"Frederic Lestrangle, the owner of the beautiful estate which bore his name, had been one of the unfortunates in the parlor car. Mortally injured, he had been carried at once to his country-seat, which was only three-quarters of a mile distant. No hope was entertained of his recovery."

The boy in Roderic died during the few frightful moments that followed upon the reading of that brief announcement. He could not believe it. There must be some mistake. He went out to William.

"Have you seen my father this afternoon?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the man. Roderic, looking at him, knew that he knew, and his heart contracted. He did not realize that he was holding the paper crushed tightly in his hand.

"Where is my mother?" he asked then.

"In her room, I think, sir."

Roderic turned abruptly and went up the stairs again. His face was grave, solemn, old. He knocked at his mother's door, and her voice, which had lost none of its sweetness with the passage of the years, bade him enter.

She was seated at her desk, writing a letter. She looked up at him.

"What is it, Roderic? I am busy."

"Oh, mother, I am sorry—" he began.

She glanced at him sharply, then sprang to her feet. She was a very lovely woman still: not a shadow on her face, not a white hair in the beautiful ebon locks. She came to her son's side, and put her hand on his arm.

"Roderic, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No," he said, mechanically; "but—but—where is father?"

"Gone somewhere—out of the city—I don't know where— What is the matter—your father is not— Roderic, tell me at once. I demand to know."

"There has been an accident near Lestrange. Father has been hurt."

"Your father—*hurt!*" She stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said, mother. He is at Lestrange now. Don't you think we had better go to him?"

"Yes." She shut her desk mechanically. "Roderic, there is no mistake? Who told you?"

"His name is mentioned in the newspaper as among the injured. He may not be so seriously

hurt, mother—you know how things are exaggerated. At any rate, we'll run out there. He may not really be hurt so much, and perhaps will come back with us."

Not until afterward did either mother or son understand how Roderic responded to the burden that had fallen upon his shoulders. He made arrangements for their journey, left directions for what was to be done during their absence, and told them he would telephone if it would be necessary to prepare for Frederic Lestrangle's return. He made as light of the accident as possible, for he saw that his mother was in a fever of unrest, and he dreaded the result of this news upon her.

Roderic never forgot that journey. In another car on the same train were seated Edward Nugent and his father. They had had to wait two hours for this express. Roderic did not know that the friends he cared for were so close to him, and bound on an errand as sad as his own. When they reached Portland, the cars could go no farther. All the passengers alighted. Even then Edward Nugent and Roderic missed each other. A conveyance was found to take Roderic and his mother to Lestrangle, while the

Nugents sought the hospital where Anthony lay dying.

It was true. Both men—father and son—realized the dreadful fact as they stood there and looked at the ghastly countenance. He recognized them, but speech came painfully. He held out his hand, and the father grasped it, and fell on his knees beside the bed, sobbing aloud.

“I thought they’d get you for me, father!” he said. “I made them telegraph.”

“They telegraphed,” said Edward Nugent, gently. “Anthony, has the priest been with you?”

“Yes. I’m dying, Neddy.”

“Dear old Anthony, dear brother, yes.”

There was silence, broken only by the sobs of the elder man, who could not speak a word.

“I went to the hotel, and found you gone,” said Edward, pitifully. “I could not understand. Where were you going, Anthony? Oh, my brother, why did you not wait—why did you not wait?”

“Wait?” The blue eyes looked up at him languidly. “He—came—Dr. Stewart—and said you had sent for me—that you were at Lestrangle on an intricate case. Of course—I went with him, I felt—hurt, Neddy. But it’s over now—

it's over now. I thought you didn't trust me. But—God—will. God knows I meant right."

The father lifted his head. The son stared with perplexed eyes into his brother's face.

"He is not raving, dad—he's sensible. What can he mean?" He called a nurse near him: "Get me this, please," he said, scribbling something on a slip of paper he tore from his notebook, "and hurry."

She obeyed with alacrity. It was some moments before she returned, and Edward Nugent sat with his finger on Anthony's pulse. Presently, when the nurse came, he prepared the stimulant he had ordered, and held it to his lips.

"You'll be stronger in a moment, Anthony," said Edward. "Wait—I'll lift you up." He slipped his arm under the pillow, and rested the languid head on his shoulder. "Now, old man, try to think what you are saying. I came straight from New York City. I spent this day in a state of great excitement, wondering why you had gone away—wondering what temptation could have been strong enough to come between us when we had planned such a splendid life together. I called at the hotel—saw your clothes there—sent them home. What happened?"

He spoke slowly and distinctly. Anthony listened with attention until he had finished.

"Neddy, I don't know. A man came there after me this morning—said you had been summoned to a country town, and that you said I should follow. I thought you didn't trust me. I went with him. His name was Stewart—he said. He was a doctor. While we were in the train I asked him where we were going. He said Lestrangle—I remember the name plainly."

He waited a moment—his voice had grown faint.

"The next isn't quite clear. There was a crash. The man jumped up. I grabbed him—I think his beard—was false—I don't know—"

The words trailed away into silence, the eyelids fluttered. Edward laid him down upon the bed again, and then both stood looking at him. Presently he unclosed his eyes.

"My mother—I want—my mother!"

The child's cry always, though the years be great or few! Edward looked at his father with questioning eyes.

"I think he'll last—until morning, dad."

"Yes, my son."

"I'll send to Jessie—Jessie will tell mother. She must be with him when he dies."

"We'll keep him alive until she comes," said Dr. Nugent, quietly.

Edward Nugent went out and sent a telegram. Then he came back again. The two men sat one on each side of the bed, watching their dying son and brother, administering the powerful stimulant as often as they found it necessary. They spoke occasionally.

"Father, do you understand it?"

"No."

"What has Lestrangle—that's Roderic's home, you know—to do with us?"

"I can not understand, Neddy."

"Why did they try to get Anthony away? What did they mean to do with him?"

"Again I can not understand."

Toward daybreak Anthony turned on his pillow, and opened his eyes.

"Are you there, father?"

"Yes, my son."

"Put your arms around me."

"They are, my lad—they've been around you all night."

"That's good, father. Will mother come soon now?"

"Yes—you will see her."

"Oh, I will not die until then? I am glad. Keep me alive, if you can, until she comes."

"Yes, my lad, we will."

"I've been thinking, lying here, that there's more to this than we imagine. This hasn't happened by accident."

"Oh, what does it matter how it happened, Anthony, my dear, dear boy!"

"God saw, perhaps, that I shouldn't have been able to do better—out there. God knows."

"It's all over now, lad," said the father, in a choked voice.

"Not yet—not until the end. I've tried to make my peace—I wasn't so bad, father, really. It was only that I couldn't resist others—I had no will power. It would have been the same always."

"I don't think so, Anthony. You would have been different with Neddy."

"That's so, too. Poor Neddy."

He relapsed into silence once more. Slowly the day began to dawn; slowly the light crept in through the shutters; little by little the sun rose.

"I'm glad I didn't die last night," whispered Anthony. "It's easier to die—this way."

They made him no answer—they could not.

"Father!"

"Yes?"

"If you find that fellow—you know—"

"Yes?"

"Don't do anything—let him be. I don't know his reasons for bringing me out here—it's a mystery. But, if ever you find them out, keep them to yourself. I want to die feeling that I have forgiven every one. Will you remember that?"

"Yes, dear boy, I'll remember."

He moved uneasily.

"Lean closer to me, both of you," he said.

They bent over him.

"That money—you remember the money they said I stole—the money they sent me away for?"

"Anthony!" cried the father, in a heart-broken voice.

"I didn't touch it—I had nothing to do with it—I was as innocent as you are at this moment of that crime. And though those fellows, the ones that swore against me, knew me, that was all. I had drifted into bad company, and I paid for it, father."

"O God in heaven, Anthony!" said the old man. "Anthony—tell me—tell your father. Why did you say—"

A smile flickered over his pale face.

"No," he said; "I've forgiven all—every one. I shall not tell that. You—you believe me, father?"

"My son, indeed I do. Thank God for it, my dear, dear son."

"If mother comes—too late—be sure she knows."

"Yes—I will tell her. Oh, my boy, my boy, if only I had been wiser—if only I could have guessed!"

They waited sorrowfully enough, watching the gray shadow slowly creeping across his countenance. Edward Nugent kept wiping the damp forehead, and glancing at his watch. He was beginning to grow afraid that they would not succeed in keeping him alive until the mother came.

They did not hear her enter. Jessie followed her, but the mother's eyes sought that one couch where those two silent watchers kept vigil over her dying son. She did not say a word, but advanced to the bedside. Light as was her step he heard her, and his eyes opened. When he saw her face, he sprang up to a sitting posture, out of his father's encircling hold, and smiled.

"Why, there is my mother!" he said, and his voice was full and strong. She clasped him in her

tender arms, and laid her cheek to his. His arms went about her neck. Just a second his strength held out, just a second his dying ears heard her gentle, loving words.

Then softly she put him back again upon the pillow, and with her own hands closed the sightless eyes; with her own hands folded his upon his breast, and stood then silent, looking down upon him, her gaze a prayer. She did not know that Jessie and the father and Edward were on their knees. She only knew that the son she loved had lived to die in her arms.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REVELATION.

“Go to the Emergency Hospital at Portland, and find out how Anthony Nugent is. Do not telephone—go. I want to be *sure*.”

When Frederic Lestrangle recovered consciousness in his own home—which was not for some hours after the frightful accident—these were the first words that he spoke. The doctor was in attendance, and Joan Lester had taken charge of the sick-room. She was the old-time, decisive Joan, in spite of her more than seventy years, still virtual mistress of Lestrangle. Other servants came and went, but under Joan’s régime it made no difference how frequent were the changes in the household that she loved.

At first no one took any notice of this remark of Frederic Lestrangle’s, being too concerned in ascertaining the extent of his injuries. He repeated it, with some irritation at last, so they summoned a servant, and despatched him on the errand of inquiry. He returned two hours later.

"Anthony Nugent's father and brother are with him. He can not live until morning."

Something like satisfaction gleamed for an instant in Frederic Lestrangle's eyes. He turned to the physician at his side.

"How about me? Will I live?"

The doctor looked at him.

"You want to hear the truth?"

"That, of course," impatiently.

"An operation would save you. It is very dangerous, and only possible if you submit at once."

Not a change in the handsome countenance.

"You mean that I shall die before morning if I do not go under the knife now?"

"Yes."

"And I may die under it, anyhow?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't have it." He turned on his pillow, groaning with pain. Then, after a moment, he spoke again.

"Go to the telephone and find out how Anthony Nugent is."

That was all. Around midnight his wife and his son Roderic entered. There was a pitiable scene when Judith Lestrangle saw her husband first, but

the approach of death awed even her. Frederic Lestrangle held on to life grimly.

"I won't die until I am sure of his death," he said.

Claire Lestrangle read the news in the same edition of the paper which had conveyed it to Roderic. The telegram that Joan sent to their city house arrived twenty minutes after the departure of the mother and son. Claire was dressing to call on them to learn the truth, when a summons came to her from Joan.

"Come," said the message. "There may be need of you."

And Claire obeyed.

She met Jessie Nugent and her mother on the journey. In the morning they parted at Portland. When she arrived at that house in which she had known the greatest joy and sorrow of her life, Joan met her.

"Miss Claire," she said, "you must forgive me for sending for you. But it may be that Frederic Lestrangle will have something to say to you before he dies."

Claire looked at her musingly.

"I do not want to stay unless I can be of service," she said. "How is he?"

"Fighting to live. There is a man at the hospital at Portland—a man named Nugent. He says he will not die until he does."

Claire looked at her, perplexed. She had heard from Mrs. Nugent that her son had been in the accident, and that she was going now to his deathbed.

"What can he have in common with a man of that name?" she said. "How does he know him?"

Joan shrugged her shoulders.

"That I can not tell, Miss Claire."

The doctor approached them.

"Couldn't his wife persuade him to submit to the operation?" asked Claire, turning to him.

"She will not have it, either. It means death. She wants to keep him alive as long as she can."

"But there would be a chance—" urged Claire.

"One in a thousand."

"One in ten thousand has saved a man before now," she said. The telephone bell rang. An instant later the servant who had been doing nothing all night but attending on that bell, passed through the room.

"What is the message?" she asked.

"Anthony Nugent is dead."

"Your master is waiting for that message?"

"Yes, madam." The servant did not know this fair-haired lady in black, but he felt that she had a right to be there, and to speak in those quick, almost imperious tones.

"Wait," she said. She went to the telephone herself. "What is the hospital number?" It was given her. An attendant answered.

"Go to the ward where that accident case is just dead—the Nugent case. You will find two gentlemen there. Tell them that Frederic Lestrangle is dying, and that an operation may save him. The physician here says he has a chance. No; no answer. Tell them that."

The servant looked astonished as she turned to them once more.

"Dr. Nugent can perform miracles with a knife," she said. There was a red spot on either cheek—the only sign of excitement that she betrayed. "Do not give that message to your master yet—not until they arrive. Try, instead, Joan, to get his wife away. Let me speak to her. If Roderic is there, bid him come too."

Joan went away immediately. Claire paced the floor in silence. Very soon Judith, followed by her son, entered the room. Claire turned to her and held out her hands.

"My sister, I am sorry for you," she said.

The gentle words, the sweet face, the voice filled with sympathy, went straight to a heart wrung by great anguish for the first time in all her sheltered life. She let Claire put her arms about her, and soothe her, and talk to her. Before the Nugents arrived she had won her consent.

"He will die without it," was Claire's reasoning, "and may live with it. He *will* live if it is in man's power to help him."

No time was lost. Young Dr. Nugent had been busy at other beds striving to drown his own grief, when Claire's message came. Father and son left the hospital together, arrived at Lestrangle, met Claire and the wife of the injured man, and heard the doctor's report. Then they went up to the sick-room.

Frederic Lestrangle was conscious, but in great agony.

"Has no message come?" he said. "Is there no one to tell me if Anthony Nugent lives?"

There had been no time to say anything regarding this matter to Edward Nugent. He bent over the prostrate form.

"Anthony Nugent died an hour ago," he said.

"Dead!" whispered Frederic Lestrangle. He

shut his eyes. A satisfied expression stole across his face. He paid no attention to the preparations going on around him. At last he spoke again:

"I thought I heard Claire Lestrangle's voice."

"You did. She is downstairs."

"I would like to see her."

"There isn't time," said Edward Nugent, hesitatingly. "But go—go quickly." Joan withdrew. Claire entered. She stood at the foot of the bed. Frederic Lestrangle opened his eyes, and gazed up at her.

"Is that you, Claire?"

"Yes, Frederic."

"Ah! I have something to tell you."

"To tell me?"

"Yes. 'In God's good time,' you said, 'God would repay.' Do you remember?"

"I do." She went very white, and grasped at the foot of the bed. He raised his hand waveringly.

"All that you suspected was true. I convinced your husband that you never loved him—proved it to him."

Claire did not speak.

"He believed me—he could not help himself. I *proved* it to him, Claire. I made truth lie to him

to prove you a woman who had married for money."

Not a single word from her pale lips.

"I did more. I coveted the Lestrangle acres and the Lestrangle wealth. Your boy was not drowned. The body in the lake was that of Tommy Lester. Your boy was sent away with old Silas Wasdale, and adopted by Dr. Edward Nugent, of Abneyville, who brought him up as his own. He was a thief and a forger. He served his time in prison, and— *he—is—lying—dead—now—at—the—Emergency—Hospital—in Portland!*"

There was silence in the room. It was a frightful silence.

"'In God's good time,' you said, Claire. Well, it's God's good time now, and I am ready."

He smiled. Claire's lips moved, but no words came from them. She tried to swallow a little. Neither Dr. Nugent nor his son moved or spoke.

"It is God's good time," said a strange and hollow tone then, "and may God forgive you! May God forgive you, Frederic Lestrangle! When you face Him, tell Him—tell Him that I—did."

No one could recognize Claire's voice in those words. She turned blindly from the bed and from the room. Joan caught her by the arm and led

her out, closing the door behind her. The two Nugents, who had been standing as if galvanized, woke now to movement. A few seconds completed their preparations. Frederic Lestrangle was lifted to the table which was to serve as operating-slab. Just before they began, Dr. Nugent touched his son's arm.

"Shall I, Neddy?"

The young man looked up at him. His brows were set, his lips tightly shut, his face old in its stern gravity.

"I am a physician," he said, "about to do my duty. All else can wait."

All else did wait. Those two faithful men stood there, one on each side of that inert form. No eye could be keener, no hand truer, than the thin and sinewy one grasping the little knife. For over an hour, with Frederic Lestrangle's life hanging by a thread, they worked. When they had finished, they knew that it still hung by a thread, but that, if no unforeseen contingencies arose, the man would live.

When he was placed back on his bed and the room cleared, Dr. Nugent spoke to the younger man once more.

"Neddy, will you tell her—now?"

His voice trembled—there were tears in his eyes.

“If you like, father. Would you rather wait?”

“It would not be fair to her—laddie, what an awful state of mind for a man about to meet his God!” He sighed. “And how *she* must have suffered!”

Joan met them.

“Doctor,” she said, addressing the elder man, “will you look at my Miss Claire?”

“We will both go to her,” said Dr. Nugent.

Then Joan seemed to see, for the first time, the figure on the bed.

“And he?”

“Will live, I hope and trust, to come to a better state of mind.”

Joan shook her old gray head.

“The honor of the Lestranges!” she said. “How I counted on it—and how it failed me!”

Dr. Nugent put his hand on her shoulder.

“Was it you or he who sent for Miss Claire?”

“I, sir. I thought he would die—I knew about the empty grave, and felt that the truth would some day come to light. I’ve been with the Lestranges all my life—my own Miss Claire, God help her!”

“God will,” said Edward Nugent, speaking for the first time. “God will. Bring us to her now—and come with us.”

Claire Lestrangle was seated in the room that had been hers in the long-past days, which had never been inhabited by Frederic Lestrangle’s wife, and which Joan had cared for in tender memory of the sweet woman she had loved so well. She had a strange look on her face. Neither of them had ever seen that look—but Joan knew it of old. Dr. Nugent went toward her, and put his hand upon her shoulder.

“My dear Mrs. Lestrangle,” he said, very gently. She raised her eyes to his.

“It is true, I suppose,” she said, listlessly. “At least, if it is true, bring me back with you and let me see—my son.”

The pathos in her quiet tones brought the tears to his eyes.

“He told you what he thought was true, Mrs. Lestrangle,” he said. “But he outstepped his knowledge. Tell me—would you like to hear the story from me?”

She gazed up at him. What she saw in his face sent a convulsive thrill through her.

“I am all confused,” she said—“if you will only

disentangle the threads for me. My boy—my little Roderic—did not die?”

“No. From what he said, he must have had him stolen away. I remember once hearing you mention Silas Wasdale. He had a grandson, Anthony.”

She bowed her head.

“I was born and brought up in Abneyville—all my children were born there. My little daughter Regine was only a baby of six months, when I was sent for by one Bernard Wasdale to attend two people ill with fever at his house. The man, who was Bernard’s brother, Silas, recovered quickly. The child was very ill. When he grew better, I offered to adopt him. He wouldn’t give him. Later on he left him to his brother’s care. What happened after that I do not know, but in the end the brother and his wife came to me, and told me I could have the child for a consideration. I paid it, and took him. He was called then Anthony Wasdale. I already had a son Anthony, so I had my new boy given conditional baptism, calling him Edward after myself, with Anthony as a middle name. Frederic Lestrangle must have discovered the truth, mistook my own poor lad for the nephew he had tried to get rid of, and managed to bring

him here where he—met his death.” For the first time the old man’s voice faltered. “The dead Anthony, madam, is not your son—instead I give your son to you alive and well.”

She stared at him, wistfully, longingly.

“What do you mean?”

“That Edward Nugent is the boy whom I adopted, and, according to all that I have heard, your own child!”

The young man leaned forward in his chair, suddenly boyish of feature, youthful of mien.

“My mother!” he said, softly.

Dr. Nugent rose to his feet, and left the room. Joan followed. The tears were streaming down her face.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO RODERICS.

ANOTHER mother and another son were seated in the room adjoining Frederic Lestrangle's. Roderic and Judith, lingering at the back of the apartment, had heard the hideous story from the lips of the man who they thought was dying. The horror of it had made Roderic sick at heart.

"You understood that story, mother?" he asked, impetuously.

The beautiful Judith looked at him.

"I understood—yes."

"And——"

"There is no and."

"Mother!"

"I am glad that he took care of your future, my son. You will be master of this place—he always meant you to be that."

"Mother," said Roderic, again, in an agonized whisper, "are you mad?"

"No, I am not mad."

"Then think—think! Think how terrible it

is! Why, he is a murderer—my father is a murderer! Think of it, mother!”

His voice had a thrill of horror in it. She sat staring at him, a little wonderingly, it seemed to the boy.

“I would not look at it like that—there will be lots of time afterward to blame him. Just now, only try to remember that he is dying, and that he is your father and my husband.”

“O mother!” he sobbed. He put his arms around her and hid his face on her bosom. “Mother, it has taken all feeling away from me. I shall never feel again.”

“Poor Roderic!” She touched his fair head softly. Then after a little while she said:

“Has your religion taught you how to pray?”

“Yes, mother.”

“I should like you to pray. Somehow it seems to me that, if you, or any one, would pray, there might be some chance for him. Pray, Roderic.”

Without a word he drew himself away from her, and slipped down on his knees beside her chair. She sat back and said nothing more, although the broken words falling from his lips seemed to satisfy her sense of helplessness. She stared straight before her, listening quietly. In a

little while the trembling voice ceased, and her boy buried his head in her lap, and sat very silent. A half-hour passed. At the other end of the hall the man they loved was lying helpless in the hands of science. Presently Roderic raised his head, and seized his mother's beautiful fingers in a feverish clasp.

"Listen to me," he said. "Mother, do you care for me?"

"My son," she whispered, "you know I do."

"And my father? You love him even better than you love your children?"

She hesitated—then the woman awoke in her. Through the calm of her face there broke an expression of intensest agony.

"O God!" she said.

"Then listen to me," he said, tenderly. "I've been wondering what God meant me to do with my life, dear mother. I know. I will dedicate it to His service, if He will save my father now."

"Roderic—"

"I should have answered the call, I am positive, ere long," he went on. "Mother, join with me—make the sacrifice holy. A mother can. You know how—you know how. Promise to give me up willingly if God will save him."

"O my child, it is all in your hands, not in mine."

"No, no; it is in yours, too."

"A priest?" she said, a little wonderingly.
"Could you be as brave as that, Roderic?"

"Yes, dear mother. I feel that God is calling me. He has been calling me right along, but I did not realize it. I did not realize it until I knelt there, and tried to pray, to ask—this favor. Mother, he must not die like that."

"If he lives, he will never consent. He will disown you."

"That would complete the sacrifice. Only say you will help me."

For a moment she looked down into his pleading eyes. Then she shivered.

"It is an awful life, my darling boy—a cold, dreary, comfortless life."

He smiled.

"I wish you knew that life, mother—or the life of any Catholic. Poor mother, to be without the faith! It is being deprived of the greatest good on earth!"

She shook her head. She had never felt the need of this good of which he spoke, and she scarcely understood all that Roderic's resolution

meant. To her the Catholic faith was cold and barren, stern and rigorous. Her husband had never practised it, and in her opinion it had made a Don Quixote of her son. But now, with the father's life weighing in the balance, with human aid almost helpless, her nature craved that appeal to a Higher Power. Roderic had always been different—that Higher Power would listen to Roderic now.

When old Dr. Nugent left the lad whom he had loved as his own with his mother, he came out into the corridor. Here young Roderic Lestrangle found him. There was a new look on the ideally handsome face, a curious glow in the blue eyes.

"Will my father live?" he asked.

Dr. Nugent placed his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"That rests in God's hands."

"They said the operation was a success."

"It was—as operations go. If nothing happens now, your father will live. But he will be months recovering."

"Yet there is a chance?"

"A strong chance."

"I will tell my mother—she is only waiting your word to go to him. My mother and father

are—greatly devoted to each other.” Roderic choked back a sob “There can be no harm if she attends him now?”

“No harm, dear boy. From what I see of her, she is strong enough—and women are mountains of strength where those they love are concerned. Let her go to him—and only her. Even you must stay away. There must be no disturbing influence.”

Roderic hesitated. “Will you wait for me here until I see my mother?”

Dr. Nugent nodded.

The interview between son and mother was brief. In a few seconds he rejoined the father of his dearest friend. They paced in silence along the corridor and down the stairs and out to the stone steps, and stood there long without exchanging a word.

“Well, boy?” said Dr. Nugent, at last.

His eyes had filled. He knew, better than words could tell him, what was passing in the mind of this truly noble youth. He felt what a shock that father’s words must have been to his high sense of honor. He knew the struggle that must be raging in his young heart.

“From what my father said—from what I can

learn—it must have been through him that the man he called Anthony Nugent met his death.” Roderic spoke quite calmly.

“Anthony Nugent forgave him before he died,” said the older man.

“You mean Roderic Lestrangle, my cousin, forgave him.”

“No. I mean my own dear boy, Anthony.”

Roderic stared at him.

“He was not your son, really.”

“He was my son, really.”

Roderic Lestrangle shook his head.

“I don’t understand—this has so upset me. I can not realize where I am or what has happened. I knew the outlines of Aunt Claire’s story—and when my father said those few words to-day the *facts* gripped me. I saw it all—yes, all. I comprehended that my father had been guilty of a great crime. In the very beginning, in order to take away—this,” he waved his hand about him in a gesture that included all Lestrangle, “from that poor little boy who was its rightful owner. He learned his plans had miscarried—he found out that you had taken that poor lad as your own, that he had been—unfortunate—and then—oh, I can not say it! How did he and Anthony happen

to be on the same train? It was not chance—my father must have brought it about. What was his intention?”

Roderic shuddered violently, frightfully.

“Anthony told us all before he died.”

“Yes? He told you, then, that my father—”

“Some one called on him, saying that his brother Edward had been summoned to Lestrange, and that he wanted him to follow at once. I do not believe your father meant to harm him. I believe he meant to conceal him somewhere in Lestrange, once he got him here.”

“To all intents, my father murdered him.”

“Boy, do not speak so harshly. You do not know the greatest event of all. In that room yonder, where once your Aunt Claire realized the death of her only child, her child has been restored to her.”

Roderic could only stare at him in wonder.

“Anthony Nugent was my boy—my own poor boy. Your cousin Roderic was my adopted son, whom you have known always as Edward Nugent.”

For an instant the young man stood stunned.

“Edward!” he cried. “Edward my cousin? Oh, it isn’t true, Dr. Nugent—it can’t be true!”

“But it is,” repeated Dr. Nugent. “I called him

after myself at his conditional baptism. Afterward, when your father recovers, perhaps he will be better able to clear up the mystery surrounding him. That Silas Wasdale brought a child to Abneyville I know, for I attended him. Even then the singular beauty of the boy attracted me beyond words. Silas said he was his grandson. Afterward he deserted him, and I adopted him. Until Frederic Lestranger's speech to-day his origin was shrouded in mystery. And one thing more—"

The fine face kindled, the fine eyes gleamed.

"If your father is living at this moment, if he recovers from his illness, he owes life and recovery to the hand of the lad whom he sought to destroy."

Roderic grasped at the stone balustrade.

"'In God's good time,' my father said—'in God's good time!' How, in His good time, He guides events, and brings them to an issue!"

The mournfulness of his voice touched the older man.

"My boy," he said, "we do not know why the Lord permits certain temptations. Your father has lived an honorable life—"

"No," said Roderic; "he has not. But if

mine can make atonement—if mine will—if mine will!”

He said the last words under his breath, standing gazing out across the broad Lestrange domain, with eyes whence all boyishness had fled.

“Will you let me stay here a little while alone?” he said then. “Afterward, if my cousin Roderic will come to me—”

Dr. Nugent withdrew. He respected the great sorrow that this young fellow was enduring now. His father’s death he could have borne, and learned surcease of pain from time. But his father’s dishonor was unbearable. The pain of it would never leave his young soul—would cast its shadow over all his life. It was to teach him much, too, for that future, when young Father Lestrange became known as “a priest after God’s own heart.”

He did not comprehend the fleeting of the hours. When the mother and son, now so happily united, had talked over that long and sorrowful story of the past; when she had shown him, with tears in her eyes, the picture of his baby face which she always wore above her heart; when she had described his father, and told him of the cruelty that had parted their loving souls—then, and not until then, did both realize that they were in-

deed alive and in a material world. How proud she was of him! How her eyes rested on him! How tenderly her fingers touched his brown head! How she brought the yellow clustering curls she had treasured so long, and laid them against his darker hair for contrast, and smiled, and cried over them, in mother fashion. They knew they were each other's, and the love of her heart gushed forth to meet her son's reverent affection.

The day was well spent when a knock came at the door. Joan had come in hours before, bringing them their lunch. She, too, had heard the story, and it was with a strange gladness on her face that she insisted on waiting on them—her Miss Claire and the boy she had loved. No other eye but one so tender dare intrude on this sacred first meeting of those two. But lunch had been well over when this second knock came, and it was Dr. Nugent himself who entered in answer to Claire's bidding. He gazed in silence at her happy face. Almost as if by magic the blue eyes had lost their shadows and the mouth its saddened lines. He understood what great loveliness this woman must have had in her gay and winsome youth.

"I have come to remind you both that this is not heaven," he said, smiling.

What a grand old man he was! That day the one who had been the object of his solicitude and prayers so many years was lying in his last sleep; that day his father-heart had been wrung with anguish; that day he had seen another cherished son claimed by one who after this would have first right to him. Less than a mile away the woman whom he had loved for nearly forty years was bowed in anguish over her loss. It was his right to be with her. Every thought of his heart went out to her; he was impatient to see her, to comfort her. And yet duty held him to his post. "Neddy" would be in no condition to attend the man whose life was in their hands, and until then he could not leave him.

"It is what I anticipated of heaven if ever I reached there," said Claire Lestrangle, humbly, and yet joyously too, in answer to his remark.

"You have had a few hours to yourselves," he went on, gently; "and now, although I do not like to do so, I feel that I must recall you to a sense of duty. Neddy—he can never be anything but Neddy to me, Mrs. Lestrangle—you must come and look at our patient. Your mother is at Portland, you know, and will need me, so that I must leave as soon as I can. One thing more—I told

his wife she could attend him, but I think it would be better if your—mother,” he paused and half-smiled. “It will be a bit of a puzzle until I get affairs straightened out,” he went on then. “That’s two mothers I’ve given you in the same breath. At any rate, it will be well if Mrs. Lestrangle leaves the house altogether, and his own son, Roderic. You can give directions to Dr. Burt for the first few days—even you must not let him see you.”

“I understand, father,” said Edward Nugent, or Roderic Lestrangle, as we must begin to call him, nodding. “I will go with you directly—and after that will take charge alone. Perhaps it would be well if my mother went with you now,” he said. “She may be of some help to you all at Portland.”

“Yes,” said Claire, with alacrity.

“Before you go, see that boy of his and talk to him. He is heart-broken,” said Dr. Nugent.

“I will go to him while you are busy, Roderic,” said Claire.

“Do, mother,” he answered, gently.

But strange as it may seem, in spite of his great affection for Claire Lestrangle, and in spite of the fact that he felt that he could never make up to

her for the sorrow his father had caused her, Frederic's son was not waiting for her—rather for the friend, who would always be his friend first, his cousin afterward.

And by-and-by the friend came, and they had a precious half-hour to themselves. There was much interchange of thought then, and outpourings of confidence from both. They parted tenderly—the better for that interview, and the happier for it. Roderic the younger decided, after making arrangements with his mother, that he would go at once to the city and take charge of his father's business affairs, also calling on the Dacres, and giving them messages from Claire.

But only to his friend and cousin did Roderic speak of the resolution that had formed in his heart—the resolution to dedicate his life to the service of God.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END.

MANY weary weeks followed—weeks in which Frederic Lestrangle's life hung in the balance, saved only by the unerring skill and great devotion of Claire Lestrangle's son. He found time to go to Portland, and pay a last visit to Anthony Nugent, to bid him a last farewell. The body was to be taken to Abneyville, and buried in the graveyard attached to the little church, where the boy had received his first communion and been confirmed.

It was the first bereavement in the Nugent family, and it seemed to affect every one of them to a great degree. They resolved not to write to Regine until all was over. The old friends who had known and loved them flocked to them from all sides. The two brothers in the city cast aside all thoughts of business, and went with their families to Abneyville. All that makes a death sacred and holy was observed, and at the Requiem Mass the old priest mounted the steps of the pulpit to

say a few words over the dead man. The words were indeed few, but they were pointed.

“Anthony Nugent left us under a cloud,” he said, “suspected of a crime. Lying on his death-bed, fortified by the last rites of the Church, with Christ’s sacred body in his breast, he declared his innocence of that crime. It is a comfort to believe those words of his. It does not matter now who was really guilty, but it is a good thing for us, who know and respect his people to understand that he suffered that penalty for another.”

The words created quite a stir, and afterward much talk, and there were many to say they had always believed in the boy’s innocence; that he was not as strong-minded as his brothers, and his sympathies were more easily played upon. It began to be rumored around that some woman, the wife of the man who had committed the crime, came praying to him to save her husband from disgrace, her children from infamy. Some, again, said that this woman had gone to Father Reynolds herself with the story, telling him all, and that that was the reason he had made that announcement. Later the rumor was confirmed, and Dr. Nugent and his wife heard the whole tale from the lips of the woman concerned in it. But be-

yond that brief announcement from the priest, nothing was ever done to clear Anthony Nugent's name. He had made the sacrifice willingly—and his father would not take away one tithe of it—letting it stand before God as atonement for whatever the poor lad might have done later against His holy laws.

When Frederic Lestrangle recovered sufficiently, he was sent away to Italy fully to regain his health. Claire Lestrangle did not see him before he left, and no one went with him but his wife. To her love and care he owed much during the months that followed. To her love, also, Roderic, who had been Edward, left the breaking of the truth.

She did it—and when she did it, many months afterward, he returned at once to see the man and woman he had wronged.

The need of Claire was so imperative that she could not bring herself to give up any of her work, so that the old-time conditions still obtained. The Nugents were bound closer to the Dacre household, that was all. Claire was still with them—her boy with those who had been so truly his parents. Roderic Lestrangle had made arrangements to be received at the seminary, and only awaited the re-

turn of his father to leave home for the life he had chosen.

Thus matters stood when Frederic and his wife Judith came back to settle their affairs, and to do justice to those to whom justice was due. He made few explanations, enough to clear up all that was mysterious. The signed attestation of the old grave-digger, which Joan sent on, was not needed. He himself told how they had taken Tommy Lester's body from the grave, and dressed it in young Roderic's clothes, and of how Anthony Wasdale had carried off the real heir. Of Anthony Wasdale nothing ever was heard again. He was probably killed in the wreck, and buried among the unknown dead in a grave at Portland.

Frederic Lestrangle had not changed any—that his son knew, looking at the proud face, observing the haughty manner. Forced to give up that to which he had never been entitled, he had not yet learned humiliation. Roderic asked himself, wonderingly, if he would ever learn it.

To the very end he carried matters with a high hand. They could do as they pleased—he had had all that he had asked of life to make him happy. Claire knew him of old, and had no com-

ment to make. For his boy's sake, whom he loved, Claire's son kept the contempt that he felt from face and voice.

And so, without comment or questioning, without blare or clamor, quietly and easily, Claire and her son came into their own again.

Frederic Lestrangle apologized to the young man who had saved his life, regretting suavely that he had caused him so much trouble. He listened to Roderic when he told him his intention of studying for the priesthood—sneered a little, in his old-time way, and said nothing. Perhaps that manner of his was but assumed for the occasion—they, with charity in their hearts for all, made it as easy as possible for this man whose plans God had frustrated in His own good time. The part that Judith Lestrangle played in it all seemed trifling, but afterward they understood how she had urged and prayed of him to do what was right, for her sake, whom surely he had wronged as bitterly as any among them. So he agreed. He was glad of it—afterward—when he did not marvel at his own audacity.

Regine was home with her Paul Delmar, and the day came when he won father's and mother's consent to her marriage with him. That night

there was a festive gathering at their home. On the morrow Roderic was to leave them. And while they sat, talking over the wonderful events of the year that had just passed, the new master of Le-strange drew Jessie Nugent away from those they loved, and held her hands, and looked into her eyes.

"Jessie," he said, with great gentleness, "will you tell me who is your Paul Delmar?"

She shook her head.

"I can not, Neddy," she answered, using the pet name that had been her father's, and that they had always loved.

"You mean you will not? You remember I asked you that question once before, and you refused to—"

"I wish you would not harp upon that subject, Neddy."

"But, my dear girl, I must; for you see, Jessie, I love you—have always loved you—loved you when we were growing up together. I did not find out what sort of love it was until you left us to study music. But I found it out then, dear—I did, indeed. And I've been waiting for you ever since."

She smiled a little.

"It does not seem like you to hesitate—so long," she said.

"If there is a Paul Delmar for you, why then, you see—"

"Oh, hush!" she whispered, softly. "If you were not blind—oh, so blind, Neddy!—you could have known it ages ago."

"Then it is I, dear?" And his voice trembled as he put his arms about her; "it is really I?"

"Really you—really, really *you*," she answered.

The rest doesn't really, really matter now, does it? There was so much to be explained; and so much to talk about—from the day that her father had brought him home and she had shared her cake with him; their nightly salutations—"Good-night, little girl," "Good-night, little boy," which had been the amusement of the family for years, until they were grown up, and Jessie left them to finish her education. And then he had to tell how he feared she had left a lover in France—how could a girl so altogether beautiful!—and sweet!—and good!—not have a hundred lovers? And then she told of how she had suffered when she heard he meant to go to California—she knew it was with Anthony—fearing that he would *never* grow to care for her so far away. And after all that was

told, there was so much more to tell. And then to make the announcement to the home circle, which Claire's son did at once, leading Jessie by the hand to the two mothers, who needed no second glance to tell them what had happened.

They have been many years married now, and Claire Lestrangle is a grandmother. The Dacres and she are still pursuing their noble work. In God's good time all was restored to her—the hope, the love of the long-past, seemingly fruitless years. And she was happy.

Regine went back to France with her artist-husband, and the following year Jessie and the new Roderic Lestrangle went to visit her while on their honeymoon. It was whispered then that the Lestrangle preparing for Holy Orders had succeeded in making a convert of his mother. If that were true, they knew that in time his father would resume the practice of the religion he had always ignored. It was, perhaps, the insight she had had into the lives of these truly Catholic people that first helped the wife of Frederick Lestrangle to receive the light of faith.

So, in God's good time, they lived out their happy, useful lives, and were content.

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